# Full Issue 2006 (Volume V)

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# INKLINGS FOREVER

Volume V

A Collection of Essays

Presented at the Fifth

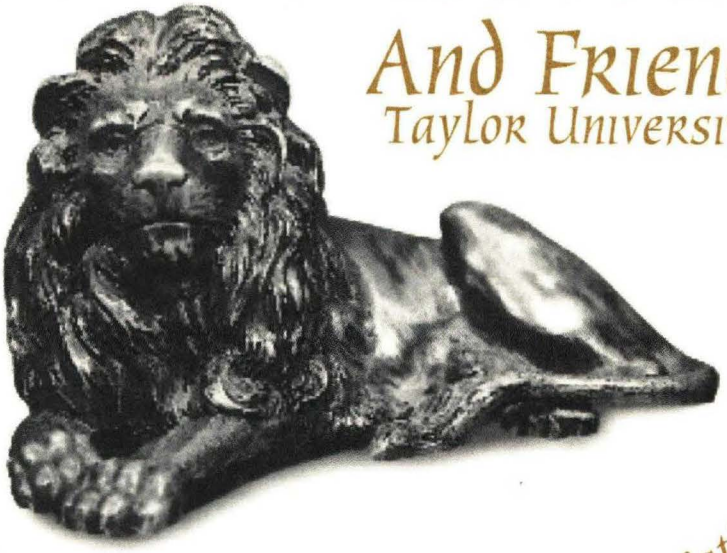
FRANCES WHITE EWBANK COLLOQUIUM

on

# C. S. Lewis

## And Friends

Taylor University



*"Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a fire?"*

June 1-4, 2006

Upland, Indiana

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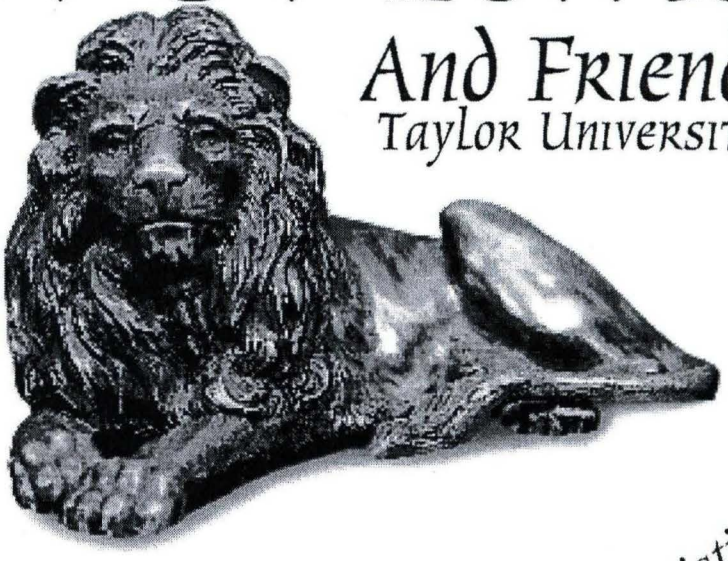

"Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a fire?"

June 1-4, 2006

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*This volume is dedicated to*

**David L. Neuhouser**

*Professor Emeritus of Mathematics*
*author, scholar, and Director of the Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis and Friends.*
*He has served the greater good of the Lewis and Friends Society,*
*The Edwin W. Brown Collection, and the Frances White Ewbank Colloquium*
*since their beginnings in the last century.*
*For his friendship, vision, and dedication we offer him hearty thanks.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Rick Hill
Editor and Concurrent Sessions Director
May 2006

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C.S. LEWIS AND FRIENDS

2006

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# INKLINGS FOREVER
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## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# Screwtape's Millennial Toast

Louis A. Markos

*(The date is December 31, 2000; the place is a posh hotel conference room in an upper-income region of hell. The League of Senior Tempters has gathered to toast in the new millennium and they have invited as their guest speaker a legendary tempter and trainer of young devils: Screwtape. After the usual formalities, Screwtape begins his address:)*

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you tonight. For forty years now I have been engaged in a massive project that has demanded unprecedented cooperation between the various branches of the Ministry of Temptation and that has consumed untold resources and devil-hours. Even our Father Below has taken an active role in what has proven to be our greatest undertaking since the Crusades. What, you may be asking yourselves, is this new scourge of which I speak? Another World War perhaps, a second Enlightenment, a renewed attempt to fool the humans into thinking they can build utopia? For shame, gentledevils. Do you think we in hell have completely lost our imagination? Don't believe those lies of the Enemy that say we in hell can only pervert and destroy. Even now we have succeeded in stealing from the Enemy what he has long claimed to be his prerogative alone: the creation of a new species of man. Ah yes, laugh if you will, but we have done it, done it so well that the humans have yet to recognize this new species rising up in their midst. Why do you look so dumbfounded, my fellow tempters? Have you too been fooled? Allow me then to rip the veil from your eyes that you may know this species and learn how best to tempt it. Let us explore together the habits, rituals, and unique life-cycle of the American teenager.

For some time, I must admit, I was frightened. It looked as if post-war prosperity in America would play right into the Enemy's hands. Think of it: millions of young Americans freed from back-breaking toil, allowed the time and opportunity to nurture their imagination and their fledgling sense of wonder. Imagine, if you can stomach it, an army of boys and girls reading those horrid plays and novels and poems that the enemy so loves. Picture them dialoguing as equals with these dead scribblers (please, Liposuk, if you're going to be sick, do leave the room) and, horror of horrors, adding their own unique contributions to the cesspool of human creativity. Just think how the Enemy could have used those desires to direct all those impressionable young scholars to himself. Yes, my gentledevils, for several years the situation looked grim indeed.

But do not worry; we rallied immediately and met the danger head-on. We knew we could do nothing to eliminate their new-found leisure time, so we shifted our tactics. Instead of trying to foment a new outbreak of child-labor (ah, the good old days; how I loved to watch those little porkers sweat), we simply filled up their leisure with an endless flow of mindless and mind-numbing trash.

As most of you are well aware, the Clamor & Bedlam section of hell has long been trying to find new ways to drown out that awful music of the spheres that the Enemy has been assaulting our ears with for the last ten thousand years. And if that were not torture enough, the Enemy insists on producing new human composers every generation to echo those celestial harmonies on earth. If I have to hear that "Air on the G String" one more time, I think I will rip out my own ears! Selfish tyrant that he is, he even stole from us the common herd. Into their dull, pathetic lives, he brought folk music and opera and brass bands. He gave them musical shows and sickening waltzes and those blasted tunes of Gershwin, Porter, and Rodgers that I still can't beat out of my brain.

Yes, the struggle has been a difficult one, but we have finally prevailed. For five hundred years the forges of hell huffed and groaned, until, but a mere 50 years ago, they spat out their greatest invention: an infernal machine with the power to demolish every melody the Enemy ever conceived. The humans call it an electric guitar, but we in hell call it by its real name: the Din-maker. True, a few tricky humans have succeeded in

coaxing occasional moments of joy from the Din-maker, but they are few and far between. Fueled by our success with the Din-maker, we next took their drums, which the Enemy had given them to help keep time, and turned them into, of all things, melodic instruments. My fellow tempters, you simply *must* listen to what the humans now call Rap, Hip-Hop, and Heavy Metal; our own C & B band would be hard-pressed to produce music of such undiluted ugliness and cacophony. It's simply wonderful; no human could possibly harbor an intelligent or passionate or spiritual thought while listening to the stuff. But there's more! Over the last century, even those beloved composers of the Enemy have begun to embrace this same hell-born ugliness and cacophony; they call it atonal music, but we in hell call *it* too by its real name: Noise. Lovely, lovely Noise. Tearing down every higher spiritual thought the humans ever had, disconnecting them from all celestial harmony, perverting that most terrible gift of the Enemy (the sense of beauty). How foolish the Enemy was to make such a firm link between Truth and Beauty. Did he not know we would first demolish Beauty, and then leave Truth to atrophy?

I can see by your faces that many of you think I have digressed, but I have not. I told you a moment ago that our new strategy for distracting the American youth from any form of intellectual or spiritual growth was to fill his leisure time with trash. Well, gentledevils, the degradation of their popular music (not to mention the barbaric and grotesque dancing that accompanies it) has been for many years now our first line of defense. You simply cannot imagine how much of their time and energy the American youth (from here on in I shall call him by his species name: teenager) pours into Rap, Heavy Metal, and its many derivatives. Those delicious humans have even invented (without our help, mind you) a machine that allows the teenager to strap his music to his ears and carry it with him wherever he goes. It has proven an absolute boon in ensuring that the teen suffer no interruption from an unending stream of noise. Believe me, my fellow tempters, there is no more effective way to block messages from the Enemy; one might as well try to discern a whisper in the midst of a pack of braying donkeys.

In many cases, the music has spurred the teens on to violence. This, of course, is a good thing and very helpful to our cause, but don't be led astray by these random outbreaks. The real purpose of the music is to make them numb, to incapacitate them for real human feeling and fellowship. We gave it to them not that they might have fun (emptiness not happiness is what we seek), but so that they might become desensitized to that terrible beauty, wonder, and mystery that the Enemy has spread so liberally amongst them. That accursed Creator! He can use the smallest flower, the most pathetic animal to grab a hold of their hearts and draw them upwards to his presence. It pains me to admit it, but the Enemy has even converted some of them to his cause through musicians who play our own infernal music on our own drums and Din-makers. How, how can we fight an Enemy who can use anything, simply anything as a means to recruit humans? You'll no doubt remember that time when the Enemy used a donkey to trick one of our own prophets. It's simply disgusting, and decidedly unfair.

Still, we mustn't despair. The music has been far more effective for our cause than his. Even those that he *does* win to his side can usually be held in a state of spiritual torpor by heavy doses of the music. And besides, it has so many other uses! Not only does it isolate and divide them from their parents and teachers; it severs them from history and from reality itself. The concerts are a truly beautiful thing (how I've enjoyed the deafening noise, the bestial gyrations, the loss of individual dignity), but beware that camaraderie does not break out. Your focus must remain firmly on using the music to provide the teen with an illusionary, masturbational world safe from adult supervision. In this area, I would suggest heavy use of what has proven to be the crown of our Teenage Corruption Project (TCP): the music video. If you think Rap and Heavy Metal are effective soul-crushers, wait till you see what happens when the music is wedded to a kaleidoscope of violent and sexual images that flash on the retina at dizzying speed! Let the Enemy try his best; I defy him to work his redemptive magic on these wonderful products of the infernal imagination.

But wait, the usefulness of the music does not stop here. The in-bred tendency on the part of young people to model themselves after heroes and leaders has generally worked in the Enemy's favor, but not anymore. The modern teenager actually idolizes the creators of this music; indeed, they often follow them like sheep, ascribing to them the respect and authority once reserved for their own fathers. Focus your best efforts on the rock star, and, along with him, you will drag in a whole pack of adoring fans. And believe me, my fellow tempters, this is not a hard task. Their heavy use of drugs, their belief in the absolute goodness and sanctity of their own self-expression, and their generally warped appetites and desires make these teen idols prime candidates for demonic control.

But a word of warning. Once you have roped in the rock star and you watch the teens begin to gather around him, you must make sure to whisper into each of their ears that their idolatry of the musician is an expression of their own individual choices and tastes rather than what it truly is: a herd instinct. Encourage them to think (and believe) that while their church-going friends are all dreary copies of one another, they are unique, special, an elite corps of free individuals who have risen above the common mass of humanity. By no means let them see that they and all their fellow fans look and dress and act exactly alike. Remember, self-deception is our greatest tool for separating them from the will and the grace of the Enemy. The more

they efface their true identity, the more you must convince them that they have freed themselves from all bourgeois standards and restrictions. The more they surrender their will to us, the more you must puff them up with a belief in their own triumphant will-to-power.

Here, of course, Nietzsche is most helpful. (Ah, Nietzsche, Nietzsche, how fondly I remember *that* soul; even as I devoured it, it kept denying my existence.) Fill your teen charges to the brim with Nietzsche's argument that all religion is a slave ethic and that they must move themselves beyond middle-class notions of good and evil. But, whatever you do, do not allow them to read Nietzsche himself. Their understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy must lead always to a simple, mindless nihilism: to a belief that everything is relative and that there are no objective moral or theological absolutes. Remember, though Nietzsche is one of our greatest allies, there are still in his works dangerous ideas. Nietzsche has an annoying habit of uncovering hypocrisies that we would rather keep hidden and of inspiring a kind of individual growth and maturity that poses a major threat to our overall plan for the modern world. And that plan is simply this: to fashion a lowest-common-denominator world where all true creativity is crushed and any attempt to rise about mediocrity is attacked as elitist and undemocratic.

In my last public address (before devoting my full time to the Teenage Corruption Project), I advised the young devils of the Tempter's Training College to foster at all costs a diabolical version of the democratic ethos. I dubbed that diabolic ethos "the spirit of I'm as good as you," and, if I may so pride myself on my prophetic powers, you will note that nearly every public educational initiative in America has helped realize our goal of producing a mass of young people who know nothing of their tradition or heritage but live trapped in a contemporary box of ideas from which most are unable to escape. Oh, what a joy it is to watch young minds be stifled in the name of political correctness or multiculturalism or all those other wonderful euphemisms the humans come up with to justify their rabid envy of true intelligence and creativity. If they were really allowed to read and enjoy Plato or Augustine or Dante the teens would see through most of our temptations with ease; but never fear, this rarely happens in the modern America we have helped to create. When any of these dangerous ideas do sneak through, we simply drown them out with the music, or, in those that cannot be so distracted, we insert in their minds a feeling of superiority over the tradition they barely understand.

Or, there is another way, one that I am particularly fond of and that I (yes, I) helped to develop. One day, while devouring the soul of Picasso, it struck me that the best defense against the various dangers posed by a knowledge of the tradition was a strong offense. Let me explain. Behind those "great" books that the Enemy so loves is not only an attempt to discern Truth but a reaching after and a celebration of Beauty (as I suggested a moment ago, the Enemy foolishly linked these concepts not only in his universe but in the souls of the humans he created). What better way to head off any appreciation of or desire for Beauty, I thought, than to produce in the teen population a craving after ugliness. Impossible, you say! On the contrary, it is *very* possible. Indeed, it has been done. Throughout America (and Europe as well), girls whose physical beauty might have been used to celebrate the glory of the Creator have purposely and self-consciously "uglified" themselves. They shave off their hair or dye it with grotesque colors. They wear clothes that are drab, colorless, and formless. Even better, they (along with their male counterparts) pierce their bodies in a hundred different places. Not since the Gnostics of the early church have I seen such hatred of the physical body, such disgust for the human form (both in its masculinity and femininity). They live, by their own choice, in a world of ugliness; their music, their art, their literature, even their language reinforce their degraded view of humanity and (the real goal, here) themselves.

At this point, most of you may be asking yourselves how we have prevented the adult population from leading their teens out of this lowest-common-denominator world. Gentledevils, that is the best news of all! Since time began, young people have learned and grown by imitating the behavior and culture of their parents and other elders in the community. But today, through much labor and toil, we have succeeded in reversing this process. Though it seems impossible to believe, in American today the adults often pattern themselves after their own teenage children. When their teens play music that is physically painful to the ears, the adults do not attempt to instill in them a higher aesthetic taste or challenge their notion of what is beautiful. Rather, they wonder within themselves why *they* are unable to "understand" this music and endeavor to conform themselves to the tastes and lifestyles of their progeny. What long, wonderful hours of laughter I have had watching the pathetic attempts of grown men and women to adapt themselves to teen culture (now how's that for an infernal oxymoron!). Indeed, whereas most popular entertainment in America used to be directed at a mature audience, nearly all such entertainment has been degraded to the level of pubescent and even pre-pubescent children. Of course, this was part of our plan as well. We made sure to equip the American teen with an almost endless supply of excess cash, thus ensuring that every marketer and advertiser in the country would target them. With each passing year, their civilization, if I may coin a new word, becomes more and more "adolescentized." No longer are the arts made to embody lasting values or to rise above the prejudices of a given time and place; rather, they concentrate on short-lived shock value meant either to numb or to titillate, but by no means to inspire deep thought and contemplation of higher truths.

Mediocrity is the rule, but it is a mediocrity that carries with it an urgency. It must be possessed *now*, no matter the cost.

For you see, teenagers, no matter the level and intensity of their rebellion against society, are first and foremost consumers. If they ever once question or doubt their role as consumer be sure to whisper in their ear that it is only "fair" that they immediately have everything that their parents have. Make sure, of course, that the thought never once strikes them that their parents did not have these things until they were well into their 30's or even 40's. Give them a lust for stuff on demand, and make them feel that it is their due, their inalienable right. And once you've established such impulsive behavior, let this too trickle upward to their parents. Let their parents feel that they too must have the newest cars, the fastest computers, the latest gadgets. Let them feel that without such things they are inadequate, perhaps even bad parents. Let discontent flow down like a mighty river, until all feelings of thankfulness have been eradicated. (By the way, did you notice how we've taught most of their media people to refer to Thanksgiving as Turkey Day?) And if you really want to have fun with the teenagers, convince them to despise all bourgeois standards as mean and hypocritical while simultaneously impelling them to purchase the most expensive stereo equipment available (paid for, of course, by their parent's credit card). Even more fun, teach them to upbraid their parents for being destroyers of the environment while hiding from them the glaring fact that theirs is the most disposable, fast-food, throw-away generation in history.

Such is the modern teenager, and, wonder of wonders, the Americans have so taken him to their hearts that they have packaged him, marketed him, and now export him to every country of the world. How it fills me with joy to watch the nations of the world ignorantly imitate every bad habit of America (I mean bad by the Enemy's standards, of course) while resisting those very virtues that we have long sought to stifle. The seed we planted in America has indeed born fruit; the world is quickly being united not (as the deluded politicians think) by real respect for the dignity of man, but by infernal music videos, adolescent Hollywood films, and a lust for unrestrained consumerism.

My fellow tempters, I wish that I could end my speech here with a claim of absolute victory, but alas, the modern teenager has within him certain unique qualities that the Enemy has often used to pull him out of our grasp. It pains me to enumerate these qualities, but enumerate them I must that you might be forewarned and forearmed.

First, and foremost, the teens (curse them) are remarkably tolerant of differences and are generally willing to give people a second chance. Don't believe the incendiary propaganda we disseminate through their fear-mongering politicians: racism, sexism, and prejudice in general are not particularly strong in the modern teen. He tends to accept others as they are and to allow them to express themselves as they see fit. This is not a good thing, but it can be channeled for our purposes. What you must be careful to do is to convince the teen that tolerance is the be-all and end-all of virtue. In this, the public schools have proven to be our willing accomplices. Let the teen view tolerance as an absolute good in the name of which any crime or immorality can be justified. The way to accomplish this is to separate tolerance from any concept of the innate dignity of man or of his shared fallen creatureliness, and attach it instead to a weak-kneed relativism best summed up by the phrase, "I like vanilla; you like chocolate." Let tolerance manifest itself not as a desire to lift up all men to a higher standard of dignity and morality but as yet another slogan for creating that lowest-common-denominator world which (as I told you earlier) is our real vision for modern America.

I said a moment ago that sexism is all but extinct among the modern teenager, though we have succeeded in fanning some residual misogyny through the efforts of our corps of rap artists (my, my, another oxymoron!). Still, among the more dangerous qualities of the teen (and of his society in general) is his willingness to allow real equality to girls and women. For thousands of years we have convinced the males of their species to keep most of their females ignorant and to stifle the exercise of their intellectual gifts and creative talents. Of course, to our dismay, those blasted women still managed to live meaningful lives, to shape their societies, and to pass on their legacy to their children, but only with great difficulty and at great cost to themselves. But now they are free, free to add their individual voices to that appalling symphony of humanity. I'm afraid there's no way to return to the good old days of oppression; however, if you will follow the steps our new misinformation campaign, you just may inspire a deeper form of oppression.

First, convince them that the New Testament, the source of all real notions of equality, is actually the chief instigator of sexism and misogyny. Then, having cut them off from the Enemy's book, cause them to equate in their minds equality with sameness; indeed, make them redefine sexism to mean the belief that there are real, essential differences between the sexes (needless to say, they must not be allowed to read the book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*). Make them believe, as we have already fooled their academics into believing, that gender is merely a social construct, that the only reason men and women are different is that they give boys trucks to play with and girls dolls to play with. If you are careful, you can actually convert their women into misogynistic feminists. No, I am not making another oxymoron. In the name of a radical, infernal egalitarianism that insists on deconstructing all gender differences, the modern female will actually suppress within herself her Enemy-

given feminine qualities and lust after those very male qualities that she claims to despise. How fun it is to confuse and degrade them, and it is so easy. Such women, in the name of the egalitarian idol, will even leave their children to be raised by society, a great boon for us, since we have already quite thoroughly infiltrated the public sphere. And those poor, pathetic boys. Despite the fact that the majority of girls are still hungry for men with the courage and esteem to be true leaders, the boys (convinced, by us, that all girls are now feminists) are afraid to assert themselves in any way or take any leadership role. Even when they marry, they remain timid and indecisive, weakening their family structure and robbing them of that sexual game of active pursuit and passive surrender that the Enemy so loves but we so hate. Yes, their egalitarian principles will allow for some modicum of intimacy, but it will not be the kind of intimacy the Enemy intended for marriage.

But all this talk of sex and gender reminds me of a third quality of the modern teen that causes me to seethe with anger. For a long, lovely generation we convinced the youth of America that sex on demand was not only a rights but would actually free them to be fuller, richer people. Satan be praised, what wonderful days those were: they copulated like dogs in the street, their passion reduced to that of insects while their lusts were as ravenous as goats. With one fell swoop, we succeeded in doing what 300 years of Puritanism could never do: we completely divorced sex from intimacy. But today (curse them again), vast numbers of teens have bonded together in a program they call " True Love Waits." They vow to remain celibate until marriage and even wear rings to display (proudly) their repulsive vow. And they really go through with it! It simply sickens me: those weak, slavish-minded fools resisting the full force of our sexualized media blitz.

Still, a slight ray of hope remains. We at the TCP, after long hours of struggle, have come up with one counter-offensive to this resurgence of celibacy. Let them remain celibate if that is their desire, but at all costs convince them that the reason for their celibacy is not that sex is something pure and holy to be reserved for the sanctuary of the marriage bed, but that sex is dirty and shameful and bestial. Whisper in the ear of every girl who wears a True Love Waits ring that she is too good to be touched by some dirty male, that it would degrade her to be thought of as physically desirable. As for the boys, let them justify their own fears of intimacy and vulnerability in the name of some vague internal crusade of purity. Yes, turn them into little prudes; make them ashamed of their bodies with all its disgusting fluids and hormonal secretions. If you can carry it off, make them hate their own sexual nature and identity. Teach them to build self-protective walls around themselves. And always, always, always, crush intimacy the moment it rears its ugly head. If you can transform celibacy from a positive virtue into a negative shield for guilt, fear, and isolation, then your victory will be complete!

I notice by the clock that my time runs short, but the urgency of the topic impels me to mention briefly two further qualities of the modern teen. The first, one that (I regret to admit) took us completely by surprise, is the growing desire among teens to volunteer their time and energy and even to run off on short-term missions. Such a concern for others can only disrupt our plans and leave an opening for the work of the Enemy. Still, you can modify the damage slightly by coaxing the teen to evaluate his charitable service solely in terms of how it affected *him*. Let him concentrate only on how the experience has made *him* a fuller person, while ignoring completely any impact on the lives of those he purportedly went out to serve. Egocentrism is a wonderful tool for lessening the harmful impacts of the Enemy's virtues. As long as the giver of charity remains trapped within his own narrow plans and his own limited self-consciousness, he will never really learn to love his neighbor as himself for he will never be able to *see* his neighbor as himself.

Closely allied to this rise in volunteerism is a renewed desire on the part of young people to seek an authentic form of spirituality. Generally speaking, this is a bad thing. Better to confine all of them to a reductive naturalism than to risk opening their spirits to the voice of the Enemy. Still, because of our coordinated efforts to promote relativism in the schools and the media, it is not too difficult to convert their quest for the Enemy into a spiritual shopping spree. Allow them no spiritual discernment, no sense that there can be both a good form and a bad form of spirituality. Teach them that if words like angel or prayer or higher power are used, then it must be good. Better yet, help them to construct their own eclectic spirituality from bits and pieces of various religions and cultures. Divorce spirituality from scripture, from doctrine, from morality, from accountability.

There is much more that I could tell you, but I see by the frantic waving of Chairman Mukrake that the dawn of the new millennium lies but a few moments away. It may shock you to hear this, but it gladdens my heart that so many humans up above are frantically waiting for the end of the world to fall upon them. Though such apocalyptic expectations have tended in the past to keep people focused on the Enemy, we have put a new twist on the matter. Today, more and more young people use such expectations as a handy excuse for irresponsibility. Rather than make difficult life choices or build lasting ties and relationships, they wait around for the end in a state of torpor. Even better, they spend inordinate time looking for us under every stone while the Enemy gets virtually ignored. And besides, I do hope that none of you here this evening really believe all those lies about the Enemy's Son returning out of the sky and casting us all into the lake of fire. Propaganda, nothing but propaganda. Dominion is ours,

my fellow tempters, and it is the teenagers who shall pave the way. Indeed, a little child *shall* lead them, but it shall be to a mountain of mediocrity: colorless, sexless, passionless, mindless. And from every hill top shall rise the Noise, louder and louder till every thought, every dream, every desire is finally and irrevocably crushed. To thee, O coming pandemonium, I raise my glass!

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# Charles Williams, the "Other" Inkling

Thomas Howard

Charles Williams is a strange figure among twentieth-century writers. His work is hard to classify since it will not fit any category of modern criticism. Is he a writer on the occult? Has he chosen worn-out themes for his poetry? May we call his narratives novels?

Lists of major British writers of this century will probably never include Williams's name. T.S. Eliot may have touched on at least part of the reason for this in his introduction to Williams's last novel, *All Hallows' Eve* (l944).

> What he had to say was beyond his resources, and probably beyond the resources of language, to say once for all through any one medium of expression . . . . Much of his work may appear to realize its form only imperfectly, but it is also true in a measure to say that Williams invented his own forms—or to say that no form, if he had obeyed all its conventional laws, could have been satisfactory for what he wanted to say. What it is, essentially, that he had to say, comes near to defying definition. It was not simply a philosophy, a theology or a set of ideas: it was primarily something imaginative. (AHE, Introd., xi, xiii, New York, l963).

If we find here a hint as to why Williams's work will never be included among the major works of our century, we may also have the key to its appeal. It was primarily something imaginative. Williams has nothing strictly new to say; but then neither did Dante or Shakespeare or Milton. What all poets do is to take what Eliot called "the permanent things" and, by discovering fresh images for them, or by refurbishing the old images and setting them out freshly, wake the rest of us up once more to the tang and bite of human experience just when we had slumped into ennui and torpor. In this connection we may recall that imagination, which is the poet's province, does not supply us with any fresh data. The poet's appeal, unlike the scientist's or the explorer's, can never rest on his bringing exciting new facts to light.

The subject of this speech, however, is Williams's prose fiction, since that is the area of his work most likely to be attempted by readers new to his writing. He wrote seven novels during the l930's and 40's. He is primarily interested in heaven and hell actually; that is to say, he is interested in human behavior. This way of putting it raises the obvious question: are you saying that heaven and hell are the same thing as human behavior? If this is what Williams really thinks, then his imagination must be very far-fetched.

It is. It is far-fetched in the sense that all true poetic and prophetic imagination is, in that it is fetched from afar. The noblest poetic imaginations have persisted in seeing the commonplace routines of our mortal experience against an immense backdrop. Eliot spoke of "the fear in a handful of dust," referring to the enormous and alarming significance lying just under the surface of even the most ordinary things. Scientists likewise see one aspect of this when they tell us about the subatomic activity raging and swirling about in the merest handkerchief. Prophets see that modest items like casual oaths and cutting remarks and icy silences will damn us to hell if we persist in that sort of thing. Poets see the whole Fall in a field mouse's scampering away from a farmer's plough, or in the fur trim on a monk's cuffs.

Everything nudges our elbow. Heaven and hell seem to lurk under every bush. The sarcastic lift of an eyebrow carries the seed of murder since it bespeaks my wish to diminish someone else's existence. The prophets and poets have to pluck our sleeves or knock us on the head, not to tell us anything new but simply to hail us with what is there.

If anyone ever saw the fear in a handful of dust it was Williams. There was no detail of everyday life, no bodily function, no chance word, no bird or bush, no kiss or shaken fist, that did not adumbrate heaven and hell for him. Like all poets, he saw a correspondence between commonplace things and ultimate things.

Williams saw these commonplaces as *images*, that is clues to what everything is about. This habit of his recalls C.S. Lewis's remark that "everything is always thickening and hardening and coming to a point." Mao Tse-tung was an irascible boy. That apparently minor fault thickened and hardened and came to the point of seventy million Chinese being slaughtered by him before he was through. At the opposite pole, God himself, being infinite Love, brought things to a point in the final image, the Incarnation. Christ was the image of God. A body here in the visible world manifested something beyond what you could see. Christians see this same principle at work in the Sacraments: bread and wine and water become signs and bearers of Grace, which is invisible. In the Incarnation and the Sacraments we have, not a disruption of Nature but a knitting back up of the seamless fabric of Creation which was ripped by us when we made our grab in Eden. Christians believe that it will be knit up again at the end of time, and that this knitting up has been begun in the Incarnation and is pledged and kept before us in the Sacraments. Hence, for a Christian imagination like Williams's, we will find that imagery is more than a matter of powerful fancy: it is very close to theology. We cannot read very far in Williams without becoming aware that almost every line summons the whole universe, so to speak. In this he has forerunners in St. Augustine, Dante, Milton, and Blake.

It is part of Williams's achievement that he made fiction go to work on a task usually undertaken only by certain kinds of poetry. The stories he wrote are bona fide stories, and you can put your feet up in front of the fire and enjoy one of these novels without having studied much theology or poetry. On the other hand, if you are reading with the smallest rag of attention, you may be inclined before very long to leap from your chair in terror or excitement. In that sense, Williams's fiction does not make for a quiet evening by the fire.

In one tale, for example, you find a chase for the Holy Grail across fields of Hertfordshire, and in another a blizzard stirred up by the Tarot cards, and in another the great Platonic archetypes in the shape of lions and butterflies appearing in the countryside. There are satanists and doppelgangers and succubi and wizards all rubbing shoulders with clerks and publishers and housewives. The topic in all of Williams's works is order versus chaos, which is to say, heaven versus hell. In every one of his novels the evil that appears entails an attempt on someone's part to short-circuit the given pattern of things, defying the rules, like a man cutting into line, or a child at a party who grabs all the best pieces of cake. Both are violating the rule of courtesy. Both are cads, and caddishness is an early straw in the wind blowing from hell. All of Williams's villains are busy making a grab for knowledge, power, or ecstasy, and the rest of you be damned. The trouble here is that the moral law of the universe is at stake. The irony is that knowledge, power, and ecstasy are the very rewards that stand at the far end of this mortal pilgrimage of ours—but only for those, let it be urged here, who have obeyed the rules. These rewards are the fruition of humility, purity, faith, courage, and generosity—of virtue, in other words. We are made for that fruition. But the way towards it is a steep and narrow one, and you have to go along the appointed way. The Beatific Vision is for the pure in heart, not for the clever, the Machiavellian, or the lucky.

Modern novels ordinarily explore human behavior in terms of manners as did Jane Austen or Henry James; or by social protest, which is what we find in Dickens; or by satire, in the manner of Swift or George Orwell; or psychological exploration, as in James Joyce. Williams, like Dante, tried to carry the exploration further in order to see what the end of it all might be, and in that end he saw only two alternatives: salvation or damnation.

It is Williams's particular strategy that arouses the consternation among hopeful readers. It all seems to sail very near the occult wind. But Williams was not primarily interested in the occult; and certainly not in the occult as any sort of end in itself. His imagination, to be sure, was aroused by various ideas that crop up in occult lore, but he remained a plain Anglican churchman all of his life. After some early forays that took him, for example, close to the Order of the Golden Dawn (the Rosicrucians), he eschewed the occult. He accepted the taboos that rule out such forays for Christians. He wrote an entire book on witchcraft, but you can learn nothing from it about how to say the Black Mass, or to conjure or put a hex on somebody.

It might be helpful here to squeak in a thumbnail biography of Williams, for what that is worth. He was born in l886, in London. He had one sister, Edith, whom I met in her old age, and it came as a surprise to her to learn that her brother was an author of some note. The family was always in the most perilous financial waters, and Williams was never able to complete his university studies for this reason. This is a pertinent point here, since he was thereby forced to become self-educated. C.S. Lewis remarked on this once, to the effect that Williams lacked that particular cast of mind that is formed in the give and take of lectures and tutorials. His mind tended to scamper. He reminds me somewhat of a hummingbird in the morning glories, although his omnivorous reading did, in fact, furnish his darting mind with an enormous freight of sheer information, especially theological, literary, and historical.

In l908, Williams went to work at the Oxford University Press as a proofreader, and stayed there until

his death in l945. Amen House, the office of the Press in London, became one of the "precincts" (a favorite word of his) of his imagination, for he found there a company of people in whom he chose to see an idealized society in which obedience to the order of Charity results in joy. (I have often wished I could have chatted with some of the other proofreaders, editors, and secretaries there, to see if they all had quite the same exalted vision of things at the office.) He wrote poems and little masques and pageants in which his colleagues show up as paragons of virtue and chivalry. He eventually dedicated one of his books "To H.M. [Sir Humphrey Milford, the publisher of the OUP] under whom we observed an appearance of Byzantium," by which he meant that the atmosphere of order and harmony in the office under a good man is a case in point of the order and harmony that might be fancied as having been at work at least in the ideal, of not the reality, of the Byzantine Empire.

Williams was physically disqualified for military service during the l9l4-l8 War. This forced him to mull over an idea which was to become central in all of his later work. He realized that the peace and well-being he enjoyed in England were due to the sacrifices being made by the young men in the trenches of France. In fact, everyone in England owed his life to these men who were laying down theirs.

To Williams, the significance of this seemed obvious. Everyone, all of the time, owes his life to others. It is not only in war that this is true. We cannot eat breakfast without being nourished by some life that has been laid down. If our breakfast is cereal or toast, then it is the life of grains of wheat that have gone into the ground and died that we might have food. If it is bacon, then the blood of some pig has been shed for the sake of my nourishment. All day long I reckon on this web of exchange. Some farmer's labor has produced this wheat and someone else's has brought it to market and so on. These people in turn receive the fruit of my work when I pay for the product. Money is the token and medium of the exchange that takes place: here is the fruit of my labor, which you need, and with this I purchase the fruit of your labor, which I need. It becomes impossible to keep all of this very sharply in focus in a complex technological society where face-to-face transactions rarely occur. But the principle of exchange is at work in international commerce as well as in the village farmers' market. It is just harder to see.

Williams coupled this idea of exchange with two other ideas, namely, "substitution" and "co-inherence." They all come to the same thing, actually. There is no such thing as life that does not owe itself to the life and labor of someone else. Even a tree is a debtor to earth and air and water, and to fire, actually, since without the sun's fire, no life at all is possible. It is true all the way up and down the scale of life, from our conception which owes itself to the self-giving of a man and a woman to each other; through my daily life where I find courtesies such as a door held open for me if I have an armload of groceries (this asks someone else's time, which itself is a momentary case in point of self-giving), to the humdrum business of traffic lights. Here we have Charity ("my life for yours") forced on us, since we haven't made it to the City of God yet, where mutual self-giving is a form of bliss. No. Here, I am obliged by law to wait (to give up a minute of my precious time) while you go; and then vice-versa. This choreography, if we may call it that, obtains all the way through to the highest realm, where a Life is offered so that we all may enjoy eternal life.

If I loathe, or refuse, the choreography, I cannot thereby change it. It presides over the whole universe so that to resist or deny it is to have refused sheer Fact. For Williams, hell is the place where such a denial leads eventually. My refusal of the delicate choreography, or "web" as Williams liked to call this rich mesh of co-inherence, is to steer towards solitude, impotence, wrath, illusion, and inanity. I will have reaped the harvest I have sown by my selfishness and vanity. I will have got what I wanted. I will be a damned soul.

On the other hand, the City of God is the place where we see co-inherence brought to blissful fruition. What we encountered in this mortal life as mere genetics, say, in our conception, or as agriculture in the bread we eat, or as law with its traffic lights and yellow lines down the road, or as courtesy with doors being held open, or as economics with its buying and selling, or as theology with Christ's sacrifice—all of this is unfurled in the dazzling light of the City of God. Saints experience as bliss the very same thing that damned souls loathe. Vexing necessities like waiting at red lights turn out to have been kindergarten lessons in joy. For Williams, joy is the final fact (and fact is a big word for him). It is the way things are, whereas hell is the way things aren't.

If, for example, I can just try getting this cup of water in the middle of the night for my spouse who is thirsty, even though God knows I am too sleepy to budge, I will have learned a very small lesson in Charity, which is the name given to this principle of exchange and co-inherence when we find it at work in an intelligent creature exercising his free will, as opposed, say, to a corn of wheat which has no such choice. I may, of course, refuse, in which case I will have missed one lesson. The difficulty here is that this refusal turns out to be more serious than my merely having missed a lesson. I have *lost* ground. I am not where I was. I have stepped back from felicity. I am now less prepared to pass the next lesson since I have contributed by my refusal to an inclination, already too strong in me, to pass up lessons. It is so much easier just to stay in bed here. It is much, much nicer. How comfortable and warm it is here. Let my spouse fend for herself. I'll just doze a bit more . . .

. . . and wake up in hell, says Williams. Not that he supposes I will be damned on the basis of a single

failure like this. On that fierce accounting we are all lost. Rather, it is a matter of realizing that whatever I do is going to nourish either selfishness or charity in me. And Williams, in his darting way, usually adds a lovely salting here: I may also learn to get the water in such a way that my spouse will conclude that it is no trouble at all for me. A small self-deprecating jest goes a long way here. I may discover, in such a minuscule exchange as this, one of the keys to joy. Selfishness and sloth, on the other hand, cannot even imagine, much less want, this joy And Williams goes on in a hundred vignettes in his novels, to suggest that yet another lesson here might very well be my own learning to *receive* such a cup of water. Charity does not fuss and protest. The giving and receiving fall into place, like the advancing and retreating steps in good ballroom dancing.

In l939 the OUP was moved from London to Oxford in order to escape the blitz. Here Williams became a lively member of the Inklings. The pub keeper at the Eagle and Child later recalled Williams dashing in and out of the side room where they all met, fetching more and more ale and beer from the bar. Clouds of pipe and cigarette smoke rolled from the room. Lewis and Tolkien eventually managed to secure an Oxford M.A. for Williams, and a lectureship in English. T.S. Eliot describes Williams perching on the desk during his lectures, looking a bit like a monkey, jingling change in his pockets and hopping about in his excitement over English poetry. His lectures were vastly popular, and he seemed to know everything by heart.

Books had been pouring out from Williams's desk during the l930's: five novels, two theological works, six biographies, three critical works, and the first volume of his Arthuriad. In his highly idiosyncratic church history, *The Descent of the Dove*, Williams sees the Church as the embodiment here on earth of what is true outside of time. In this visible body of people, the world may see the adumbration of holiness, the paradox being that holiness glimmers through somehow, no matter how poor a showing this body of people makes.

You could shout at him until you were purple in the face about the atrocities of which the church as been guilty and he would insist, "Nonetheless Christ calls her holy." Or you could flap the hair-raising pages of Byzantine court history under his nose for as long as you wished, and he would say, "Quite so. Quite so. But nonetheless the real thing was there at the heart of all that perfidy. They ruined things, to be sure; but that does not ruin my metaphor. I am talking about Byzantium as an image, not Byzantium as history."

We have to run hard to keep abreast of this capering, scampering imagination of Williams. A policeman shows up in his novel, *The Greater Trumps*: we must not balk if we hear a character say, "'Behold the Emperor.'" As far as Williams is concerned, a policeman and an emperor are both cases in point of vested authority. Each must carry his appointed burden of answerability, the policeman for this crossroads here, the emperor for the empire. Both are uniformed, or vested, if we will, and those vestments, whether they are made of blue drill or cloth of gold, bespeak the office which the mere man happens to be charged with, in the same way that priestly vestments on a man bespeak Christ's priesthood, sparing us all from the vagaries of Mr. Jones up front here with his penchant for bow ties and brown and white wingtips.

This is crucial to Williams's whole vision. He saw that the task or office was bigger than the man who held it. The crown is there before King Arthur puts it on. Prophecy is there before Elisha receives the mantle. Poetry is there before Dante picks up his pen. Fatherhood is there before I take my son in my lap. I had better pay attention to the rubric that governs the office, for I have been asked to serve *it*. It is not there to serve me. "More than the voice is the vision, the kingdom than the king," Williams has his poet Taliessin say. The point for the poet or the prophet is not his own voice, much less his personality, preferences, inclinations, fears, rights, or anything else. The vision burns all to ashes. He must forget himself. There is nothing for it but the complete immolation of himself. That is the way it is. So also for the king.

The paradox here is that this immolation is the very thing that discloses the man himself in all of his dignity. If he had tried to preserve some modicum of himself lest it get lost in the shuffle, he would have ended up with just that modicum.

This all hangs like a bright cloud over Williams's characters, the way it hangs over all mortals. A man may either assent to it; or he may refuse it. Assent or refusal. Joy or wrath. Heaven or hell. A man must choose, alas. If it seems dreadful, we may recall similar teaching from the greatest of all teachers. Williams did not make it up.

The slogan, "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou," catches for Williams the idea of things both cloaking and disclosing luminous realities. The policeman, for example, stands for much more than himself, but he is not synonymous with this "much more." The image is flawed, of course, like all mere images. But if you follow the matter all the way to its source, you will find The One who is the fountainhead of all perfections—all authority, majesty, power, glory, honor, wisdom, venerability, holiness, or valor. Hence we may say of any true image, "This also is Thou," inasmuch as the image does indeed adumbrate that "Thou," but we must hurry in and declare "Neither is this Thou," inasmuch as no image except for the Incarnate Word is equal to the Thou. That way lies idolatry.

We may utter this maxim when we encounter true romantic love (not to be confused with what is hawked by pop media in our time). Williams loved what he called the "theology" of romantic love. I have already touched on this earlier on. Self-giving turns out to be

the very avatar of joy. No Christian can think about it for very long without murmuring, "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou."

One temptation for lovers, of course, is to linger. But lingering can be lethal if it becomes an end in itself. This shows up in Williams's best novel, *Descent into Hell*, as one of the doorways to hell. Lawrence Wentworth, the anti-hero of that book, supposes that he loves Adela Hunt, but since he is a wholly vain man, Adela can exist for him only as an adjunct to his vanity. Presently, therefore, he finds himself satisfied with a mere succubus—a travesty of Adela which he now prefers to the real Adela, since the real one, by being a real *other*, presents a threat to his vanity which, in the last resort, wishes to be the only person in the universe. Wentworth is very busy damning himself to hell.

We cannot quit this ever-so-hasty sketch of Charles Williams without mentioning his beloved "Beatrician vision." He wrote a whole book entitled *The Figure of Beatrice*, which refers, of course, to the Florentine lady whom Dante saw and fell in love with when he was a boy. Although Dante married Gemma Donati, he placed Beatrice very near the summit of his entire poetic theology, only two steps below the Blessed Virgin herself. This was because he saw in her perfections an adumbration of the heavenly perfections. From the Christian point of view he was altogether on the mark here: what is beauty anyway, if not the very print of the Divine Beauty from which all lesser beauties derive?

And the corollary of the Beatrician vision is the Dantean phrase *la carne gloriosa e santa:* the holy and glorious flesh. Catholic piety and vision, from apostolic and patristic times on, was keenly aware of the mystery of the Incarnation and hence of the great mystery whereby Grace lifts our mortal flesh and glorifies it. All of the great events of Redemption occur in embarrassingly physical terms—an oddity that may at times be swept under the rug in non-Catholic piety and vision, where the mystery of redemption is spoken of in verbalist, propositionalist, cerebral, abstract terms like sovereignty, predestination, regeneration, election, and so forth. Catholics (and Williams was catholic with a small c) tend to focus on the Annunciation (a zygote was implanted in a uterine wall), the Visitation (two pregnant women), the Nativity (a parturition), the Presentation (a circumcision) and the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, all entailing the Sacred Body of Our Lord. Hence, when Dante (and Williams in Dante's retinue) speaks of "the holy and glorious flesh," they are extolling the work of Grace whereby our mortal flesh is raised and made to reign with Christ. Icon #1 of this mystery, of course, is the Blessed Virgin who prophesied that "all generations shall call me blessed." Williams was exquisitely aware that it is not the habit of Protestant Christians to do any such thing, but he loved to tweak everybody's nose.

In any event, Williams, in very Williamsian fashion, fastened upon this phrase, and it may be hoist as an ensign over all his work. I must end now by mentioning that Williams all his life flitted around the Roman Catholic Church (he stayed Anglican however). Whether he will have to give an accounting of this at the Trump of Doom, I do not know, since the only person I shall have to answer for, alas, is myself.

# The Sympathetic Imagination: Healing the Wounds of Individualism in the Incarnational Aesthetics of C.S. Lewis

Philip Harrold

Ten years ago, at a gathering at Lambeth Palace, an "alternative worship" service was vividly described as follows:

> "On the first visit to a service, the main impression is visual. Screens and hanging fabrics, containing a multiplicity of colours, moving and static images continuously dominate the perceptions. There are other things: the type of music, often electronic, whose textures and range seem curiously attuned to the context of worship, smells, the postures adopted by the other worshippers, . . . . As the mental picture begins to fill up with details, there is a growing appreciation that considerable technological complexity is sitting alongside simplicity and directness. The rituals—perhaps walking though patterns, tieing [*sic*] a knot, or having one's hands or feet anointed—are introduced with simple, non-fussy directions. The emphasis is on allowing people to do what will help, liberate, and encourage their worship rather than on the orchestration of a great event . . . . Where something is rather obscure, its purpose is to invite further reflection, perhaps teasing the worshippers to look deeper beyond the surface meaning . . . . For many of those who stay, they have never before had an experience of Christian worship like it. It is as though they have come to a new place which they instantly recognize as home."

Then, as now, the Rev. Dr. Paul Roberts pleaded for a renewed appreciation of the artistic sensibility in worship, not for art's sake alone, but as part of a "vibrant missionary engagement" with postmodern aesthetics—embracing its "richer, multi-layered, and more fluid textuality—envisioning meanings and appreciating multivalence through a variety of media."[1]

Roberts presently serves Anglican parishes in Bristol, England while co-hosting "alternative worship.org," a self-described "gateway for anyone researching Alternative Worship and new forms of church." A similar web-based service is provided at Vintagechurch.org by a counterpart to Roberts on my side of the pond, Dan Kimball, pastor at Santa Cruz Bible Church in California. Accordingly, Kimball wants the aesthetics at his church "to scream out who we are and what we are about the moment people walk in the doors."[2] Neither enterprise sees itself as trendy, seeker-sensitive, or mere window-dressing. Rather, the basic conviction is that arts speak to more fundamental concerns regarding the transcendent realities of truth, goodness, and beauty. Assuming that "people who value beauty might eventually look for truth," the arts become a tool of evangelism, a pathway to God.[3] Indeed, Brian McLaren, a leading spokesperson for the Emergent Church/Conversation [EC] in the U.S., believes that "image (the language of imagination) and emotion (including the emotion of wonder) are essential elements of fully human knowing, and thus we seek to integrate them in our search for this precious, wonderful, sacred gift called truth . . . "[4] Otherwise, the gospel remains "flattened, trivialized, and rendered inane," observes McLaren—with a message stuck in the small world of "Sunday School Christianity," unable to connect with a postmodern culture that is visually inclined, aesthetically charged, and open to—if not in outright pursuit of—mystery.[5]

Seasoned insiders to the EC like Alan Roxburgh, a writer and theological educator in Vancouver, B.C., admire such "wonderfully creative movements of bright young leaders," while, at the same time worrying that they might cater to self-actualization, becoming "purveyors of more experiential, artsy, aesthetic forms

of religious goods and services." [6] The aesthetic media may very well morph into the message, confusing style and substance—"undeniably cool," yes, but never actually answering the question, "What is the Gospel?" Scott Bader-Sayre and Andy Crouch, authors of two important cover-page articles on the EC in *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* (respectively), heartily endorse the recovery of a sense of mystery and transcendence through the arts—especially for those who have given up on the "small life" and superficiality of contemporary evangelicalism. Perhaps the emerging experience—in worship gatherings as well any artistic engagement with the wider world—will also nudge today's alienated youth to see beyond their angst, into the numinous, finding a spiritual place they can call home. But all this relevance, according to Bader-Sayer, will have to be "modulated" by resistance—by the counter-cultural move to "[interpret] the culture to itself" in light of the hope conveyed in the story of Jesus Christ.[7] Lauren Winner expresses the tension well when she asks, "How do you simultaneously attend to the culture *and* be a pocket of resistance?"[8]

If any of this sounds familiar, it is likely because the contemporary EC interest in artistic expression is reminiscent of the challenges and opportunities C.S. Lewis encountered as he *smuggled* theology into his own post-Christian world through the literary media of fantasy and myth. I see two significant areas of correspondence here. First, regarding context, Lewis was just as persuaded then as the EC is now that the church was in a "missionary situation." Writing in 1945, he observed: "A century ago our task was to edify those who had been brought up in the Faith: our present task is chiefly to convert and instruct infidels."[9] Given the pervasive spiritual alienation of his day and, indeed, of his own early life, Lewis advised an indirect or "latent" approach to evangelism that nurtured, through the poetic and mythic imaginations, a disposition to *hear* (pre-evangelism) then *believe* (pre-apologetics) the Gospel.[10] Just as Paul Roberts hopes that today's "alternative" worship services will "tease" their participants to "look deeper" at life and its ultimate destination, Lewis hoped his fantasy writing would, at the least, awaken deep longings for transcendence. Both see re-enchantment and its attendant aesthetic practices as evangelistic endeavors in a world filled with competing ideologies and narratives, or perhaps a world that has no story to tell at all.[11]

There is a second important area of correspondence between the missional aesthetics of Lewis and the EC, and that has to do with the way both understand the stealthy relationship between artistic or literary expression and apologetics. Lewis actually used the term *smuggle* in reference to his fictional works much the same way that EC proponents speak today of the subversive ways they are communicating the Gospel in the eclectic vernacular of postmodern culture. In a letter to Anglican nun Sister Penelope (CSMV), written in the summer of 1939, Lewis observed how "any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people's minds under cover of romance without their knowing it." He recalled his early experience of "*almost* believing in the gods"—indeed, feeling something akin to "holiness"—through George MacDonald's "fantasies for grown-ups."[12] Later in life, in a more familiar passage from his essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," Lewis observed:

> I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood . . . . But supposing that by casting all these things [Christian teachings] into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.[13]

Indeed, Lewis knew those "watchful dragons" quite well because he had moved in fits and starts beyond the smallness of his Sunday School Christianity into a "region of awe"—a spiritual journey of deconversion and reconversion that anticipated much of the religious autobiography we see among today's self-described postmoderns.[14] Smuggling was, in effect, an act of "redemptive deconstruction," according to Louis Markos: "Lewis dissociated the signifieds of Christian theology from their typical, uninspiring signifiers (their Sunday school associations) and attached them instead to a new set of signifiers with the power to reinvigorate and inspire young and old alike."[15] He accomplished this through bold use of allegory, myth, and symbol—genres and literary devices that are most amenable to an incarnational aesthetic, the "transposing" of divine presence or, at least, transcendent meaning into a "lower" medium of communication.[16] Little wonder that emergent writers like Charlie Peacock and Brian McLaren admire Lewis for his "imaginative and mystical sensitivities," especially his literary "portals" which lead the reader beyond the confines of the self into the heavenlies.[17]

There remains, however, a crucial, yet often overlooked, *social* dimension in Lewis's incarnational aesthetic—a dimension I refer to as the sympathetic imagination. Because this more earthly aspect directly challenges the persistent individualism of late-, as well as post-modernity, I would like to suggest its particular relevance to the EC's embrace of the arts today. Let's begin with Lewis's most explicit statement concerning the role of sympathy in the exercise of the imagination, as found in *Miracles* (1947). In his chapter on the Incarnation—"the Grand Miracle"—he explains how God becoming man is replicated "in a very minor key"

throughout all of nature by the sympathetic relations humans enjoy with each other and even with animals. An awareness of these lower transpositions—especially through an exercise of the poetic imagination—reveals a world in which "everything hangs together and the total reality, both Natural and Supernatural, . . . is more multifariously and subtly harmonious than we had suspected." At this point, Lewis is most interested in developing the incarnational principles of recapitulation and vicariousness as they intimate the Grand Miracle, but he also acknowledges their profound social implications. In marked contrast with the natural human tendency of self-sufficiency, he emphasizes how identification with and sacrificing for others, and receiving their selfless offerings in return, is a way of disclosing, albeit imperfectly (or "faintly"), a fundamental attribute and activity of the Divine Life.[18]

Later, in a more thorough discussion in the Epilogue to *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), Lewis correlates this sympathetic disposition with the benefits of literary practice and experience. Chiefly among them is the capacity of the imagination to enter into the perspectives and experiences of others:

> Good reading, therefore, though it is not essentially an affectional or moral or intellectual activity, has something in common with all three. In love we escape from our self into one other. In the moral sphere, every act of justice or charity involves putting ourselves in the other person's place and thus transcending our own competitive particularity. In coming to understand anything we are rejecting the facts as they are for us in favor of the facts as they are. The primary impulse of each is to maintain and aggrandize himself. The secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness. In love, in virtue, in the pursuit of knowledge, and in the reception of the arts, we are doing this.

For Lewis, the immediate "good of literature" is that it "admits us to experiences other than our own," and, in so doing, "heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality."[19] Of course, this requires a "baptized imagination"—one that permits any artistic or literary endeavor, even the "sub-Christian" variety, to point upwards to God.[20] But, again, note that for Lewis, this imagination has a profound horizontal dimension as well—one that begins and ends in a phenomenology of sympathetic relations with others.[21] Here, we find the sort of concreteness that Lewis appreciates in the "spontaneous tendency of religion" to resort to poetic expression. After all, for Lewis, it is poetic, not "ordinary" language that conveys the *presence* of the object as much as its meaning. This is what I think Lewis has in mind when he extols the remarkable powers of poetic language—the way it uses "factors within our experience so that they become pointers to something outside our experience." What can he be referring to here except the arena of our interpersonal relationships, where love, transgression, alienation, and forgiveness all provide opportunities to "verify" fundamental Christian ideas? Forgiveness, for one, resists precise definition, but it can be communicated with uncanny specificity and emotional impact in poetic language and a wide array of other artistic forms. Ultimately, Lewis despaired that while this storehouse of "hints, similes, [and] metaphors" was crucial to late-modern apologetics, it was under-appreciated, and, consequently, under-utilized.[22]

This may not be the case today, especially considering the EC's enthusiastic and, at times, exotic attempts at new forms of Christian community and "corollary apologetics." The EC, in fact, describes itself as intensely relational.[23] But, as Paul Roberts and others inside the movement observe, EC ecclesiology is "still unformed and provisional"—in large part, I think, because it lacks a central organizing principle.[24] It would be much too modern, of course, to build anything on a blueprint, let alone *one* blueprint(!), but the incarnational aesthetic offered by Lewis is remarkably fluid, adaptive, and missional. More importantly, it modulates the EC's passion for relevance with a relational phenomenology of sympathetic imagination that strongly resists, as St. Anne's did in *That Hideous Strength*, potent cultural pressures of competitive individuality, on the one hand, and reductive homogenization (the proverbial "lowest common denominator"), on the other. However Lewis's aesthetic is applied—in the creation of new forms of worship, new channels of literary endeavor (especially on the Internet), or sponsorship of the arts—it must be informed by the "The Grand Miracle." The Incarnation was, after all, Lewis's chief source of inspiration, and he devoted most of his life to letting it work its peculiar magic in his mind and craft. "It digs beneath the surface, works through the rest of our knowledge by unexpected channels, harmonises best with our deepest apprehensions and our 'second thoughts,'" he observed, "and in union with these undermines our superficial opinions."[25] Ultimately, for Lewis, that's what the sympathetic imagination is all about.

## Notes

[1] Paul Roberts, "Liturgy and Mission in Postmodern Culture: Some Reflections Arising from 'Alternative' Services and Communities," http://seaspray.trinity-bris.ac.uk (accessed September 5, 2003): The author is an ordained priest in the Church of England, serving parishes in

Bristol. This online paper was presented at the "Alternative Worship Day" gathering at Lambeth Palace in 1995.

[2] Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Zondervan-Emergent-ys, 2003), p. 135. Kimball's church can be visited online at http://vintagechurch.org.

[3] Andy Crouch, "Visualcy: Literacy Is Not the Only Necessity in a Visual Culture," *Christianity Today* (June 2005): 62.

[4] Brian McLaren, "An Open Letter to Chuck Colson," *A New Kind of Christian* (December 2003). See http://www.anewkindofchristian.com/archives/000018.html (accessed December 16, 2003).

[5] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Zondervan, 2004), p. 145; also quoted in an interview with Jason Byassee, "New Kind of Christian: An Emergent Voice," *Christian Century* (November30, 2004): 29.

[6] These concerns are raised by Alan Roxburgh, "Emergent Church: Filled with Creativer, Energetic Potential," *Allelon Ministries* (June 15, 2005). See www.allelon.org/articles (accessed June 23, 2005).

[7] Scott Bader-Sayre, "The Emergent Matrix: A New Kind of Church?" *The Christian Century* (November 30, 2004): 20-27; and Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today* (November 2004): 36-41.

[8] Winner, quoted in Bader-Sayre, p. 26. Winner is author of the popular spiritual autobiography *Girl Meets God: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2002).

[9] Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 93-94.

[10] Stephen M. Smith, "Awakening from the Enchantment of Worldliness: The Chronicles of Narnia as Pre-Apologetics," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C.S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 168-181.

[11] Regarding Lewis's explicit evangelistic agenda, see especially his essay "Christianity and Culture," in *Christain Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 12-36.

[12] Lewis, Magdalen College-Oxford, to Sister Penelope CSMV, 9 July (August) 1939, in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2, *Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931-1949* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), pp. 262-3.

[13] Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, comp. and with Preface by Walter Hooper (New York: Harvest Book-Harcourt, 1996/1994), p. 37.

[14] Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955), 221. Some prominent examples from EC circles include: Gordon Lynch's *Losing My Religion? Moving on From Evangelical Faith* (London: DLT, 2003); Dave Tomlinson's *The Post-Evangelical* (El Cajon, CA: Emergent ys-Zondervan, 2003); Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003); and Brian McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy* (Zondervan, 2004), esp. Chapter 9. For a helpful critical assessment of the deconversion phenomenon in contemporary evangelicalism, see Kurt A. Richardson, "Disorientations in Christian Belief: The Problem of De-traditionalization in the Postmodern Context," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), pp. 53-56.

[15] Louis Markos, *Lewis Agonistes: How C.S. Lewis Can Train Us to Wrestle with the Modern and Postmodern World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), p. 139.

[16] Lewis, "Transposition," in *The Weight of Glory* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1949/1976, rev. 1980), pp. 98-99. Transposition, for Lewis, is not strictly a literary strategy, but rather a broad statement of principle regarding the analogous relations between the spiritual and natural or the higher and the lower realms. In Christian theology, Lewis referred to the sacramental as a more advanced instance of transposition (p. 102).

[17] Charlie Peacock, *New Way to Be Human* (Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2004), p. 176; and McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, pp. 150-151.

[18] Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: MacMillan, 1947/1960), pp. 111, 118-120.

[19] Lewis, "Epilogue," in *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge UP, 1961), pp. 130, 139, 140.

[20] Lewis spoke of his own baptized imagination in his preface to *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1946), p. xxxviii; see also *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 179-180.

[21] The term 'phenomenology' is often used in the sense of Rudolf Otto's notion of the *numinous*—the experience of 'the holy' aside from its moral or rational aspects. Lewis appreciated Otto's phenomenological description of the universal or essential aspects of religious experience, but he also acquired a taste for philosophical phenomenology from the lingering neo-Hegelianism at Oxford University—especially that of T. H. Green (d. 1882), F. H. Bradley (d. 1924), and Bernard Bosanquet (d. 1923), all of whom were "mighty names" in Lewis's intellectual formation. Their cumulative effect on Lewis was to

provide a door *into* Christianity; this according a letter he wrote to Paul Elmer More, 25 October 1934, in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, p. 145. Green and Bradley, in particular, appropriated the venerable notion of sympathy into their modified Hegelianism as a mode of moral reasoning. It was also a more popular expression of ethical sentimentalism that influenced evangelical piety throughout the late 18th and nineteenth centuries. John MacCunn provides an introduction to Green's version of sympathy in a standard work that was contemporary with Lewis's philosophical studies; see *Six Radical Thinkers* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1910/1964), pp. 215-266. For a recent overview of Lewis's idealist phase, see David C. Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C.S. Lewis's Journey to Faith* (InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 123-137.

[22] Lewis, "The Language of Religion," in *Christian Reflections*, pp. 137-138. For a helpful survey of how Lewis accomplished this in his fictional works, see Kath Filmer-Davies, "Fantasy," in *Reading the Classics with C.S. Lewis*, ed. Thomas L. Martin (Baker Academic, 2000), pp. 285-296. Thus, in *The Narnia Chronicles*, we see how community forms through the mutuality and cooperation of siblings, each with their own distinctive roles and individualities, but also varying capacities of affection and friendship. We also see how the wicked witch Jadis seeks to destroy these sympathetic relations and, in the telling of the story, we find ourselves identifying with the struggle to resist and, sometimes, redeem the resulting brokenness. The Space Trilogy takes us further into the realm of human and social psychology, but, as Kath Filmer-Davies has observed, as much through an exploration of *inner* space, as outer. In *The Great Divorce*, we plunge into the dark world of human selfishness while, in Lewis's last novel, *Till We Have Faces*, we encounter the fundamental human tension between submission and control. In all of these works of fantasy, the immediate concern with interpersonal dynamics remains accessible to our (the reader's) sympathetic imagination. Accordingly, by the very act of "good reading" we are moving about in a world that is creatively designed to nudge us beyond the tiny sphere, if not prison, of our own self-interest.

[23] See, for example, Dan Devadatta, "Strangers but Not Strange: A New Mission Situation for the Church (I Peter 1:1-2 and 17-25)," in Craig Van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 110-124; James Wm. McClendon, Jr., "The Practice of Community Formation," in Nancey Murphy, et al., *Virtues & Practices in the Christian tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Trinity Press, 1997), 85-110; and The Rutba House, ed., *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, Oregon: CascadeBooks, 2005).

[24] Paul Roberts, "Considering Emerging Church," *Thinking Anglicans* (August 28, 2003). See www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/000129.html (accessed March 20, 2005).

[25] Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 131.

# The Almighty is Slipping Past Us:
# C.S. Lewis and the Problems of Rote, Reverence, and Metaphor

Dave Fillman

In the long and enduring history of Christian literature, one of the most subtle and important statements ever made is to be found in C.S. Lewis's monumental work Mere Christianity. To grasp this statement is to see not only one of the most frightening, and fundamental problems facing the modern Church, but also within the statement, the sight of a possible solution.

In his chapter titled "The Shocking Alternative," Lewis makes the case that in ancient Biblical history, God singled out and revealed himself to the Jewish people. He goes on to say "Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He were God. He claims to forgive sin. He says he has always existed. He says he is coming to judge the world at the end of time" (54). In essence, Lewis goes on to say that this claim was ". . . the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips" (55). It is in reference to Christ's claim to forgive sins that Lewis makes his extremely important statement: ". . . the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to" (55). Though this is an isolated sentence, it speaks volumes concerning Lewis's view of the human condition in relation to God. In this statement, he is alluding to the fact that, the claims of the very Word of God concerning Christ can simply slip past one's notice. And so the question becomes: how does one keep the impact of the worth of the claims of Almighty God from slipping away unnoticed?

Though there are numerous barriers that can keep one from fully comprehending the impact and worth of the Word of God, three examples of these barriers can be given from three of Lewis's works: Mere Christianity, Miracles and On Stories. And the three barriers are rote, reverence, and metaphor.

The first barrier has been alluded to in the statement just read, where Lewis, speaking of the claim of Christ, said "we have heard it so often . . ." He is implying a kind of mechanical hearing, which comes about through constant repetition. This barrier may be properly defined by The Webster's Dictionary as "rote": "Routine or repetition carried out mechanically or unthinkingly" (999). Constant repetition can cause not only mechanical hearing, but a mechanical response to the Word of God, as seen in Lewis's second chapter on faith in Mere Christianity. In this chapter he argues for the fact that mankind is in an undone condition in relation to the Almighty. He states that if a man thinks in a certain way, "He is misunderstanding what he is and what God is. And he cannot get into the right relationship until he has discovered the fact of our bankruptcy" (127). It is in the following paragraph that Lewis makes the case for the mechanical response:

> When I say "discovered," I mean really discovered: not simply said it parrot-fashion. Of course, any child, if given a certain kind of religious education, will soon learn to *say* that we have nothing to offer to God that is not already His own and that we find ourselves failing to offer even that without keeping something back. But I am talking of really

> discovering this: really finding out by experience that it is true. (127)

Here Lewis defines "parrot-fashion" as a merely learned response: to say something unthinkingly or mechanically. The Webster's Dictionary defines parroting: "To repeat by rote"(828).

What is also frightening for the Church is the inherent danger that accompanies rote hearing and response as seen in the warning of Scripture that particularly addresses this condition, found in the book of Isaiah:

> Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*, therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, . . . And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed" (New American Standard Bible, Isa. 29:13,14).

So, not only from Lewis's perspective but from Scripture itself, the rote mind is clearly a dangerous, unthinking, mechanically learned response. It causes us not only to give "lip service," but it also causes wisdom and discernment to be concealed. As a result, as he has already stated, it causes the most shocking claims of God to simply "slip past us unnoticed." But how can this be avoided?

The second barrier is found in a chapter called "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," in Lewis's book On Stories. In this chapter, Lewis speaks of a certain paralyzing childhood inhibition, and ask the question: "Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. And reverence itself did harm"(47). Here, the second barrier is identified as a false reverence. This comes about through inhibitions, due to "religious" feelings, that are brought about by coercion.

The third barrier is identified in the chapter "Horrid Red Things" from his book Miracles, Lewis addresses the issue of metaphor, and suggests that any man with a modern education when looking into any authoritative statement of Christian doctrine, will find himself faced with a completely "savage" or "primitive" picture of the universe (68). He states that, "Everything seems to presuppose a conception of reality which the increase of our knowledge has been steadily refuting for the last two-thousand years and which no honest man in his senses could return to to-day" (69). According to Lewis, the reason for the modern rejection and disgust for Christianity is that "When once a man is convinced that Christianity in *general* implies a local "Heaven," a flat earth, and a God who can have children, he naturally listens with impatience to our solutions of particular difficulties and our defenses against particular objections" (69). And so the third barrier, concerns the anthropomorphic imagery that is found in Scripture, and may be defined as metaphor.

When dealing with these three aspects of hindrance, one must return to the original question: how does one keep the impact of the worth of the claims of Almighty God from slipping away unnoticed? How does one scale the incredibly imposing barriers of rote hearing and response, reverence that is forced, and the sometimes strange and "primitive" metaphorical language used in Scripture?

The beginning of the solution is to be found in Lewis's earlier quote on parroting. Remember, that Lewis places the idea of learning something "parrot-fashion" in opposition to "really discovering . . . really finding out by experience that [something] is true." And so, to Lewis, there is a way to actually experience the truth of the impact of the worth of God, and the solution is to be found by re-casting the image of God. Returning to the section of the previous quote from his book On Stories, Lewis continues his thoughts of what to do about the inhibitions brought about by forced reverence. In the part of the paragraph that follows, he gives his oft-quoted solution that we have been looking for, "But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could" (47).

Here, then, is Lewis's magnificent answer. By casting the things of God and the sufferings of Christ into an imaginary world, one steals past the watchful dragons of inhibitions, piety, and Sunday school associations which, after time, could only degenerate into rote hearing and response. By employing this solution, one does not let the experience, potency, and wonder of the Almighty slip past.

Lewis does this obviously and famously in his greatest work of fantasy, The Chronicles of Narnia. But he also uses this methodology in his theological writings as well, by sometimes "re-casting" the things of God and the sufferings of Christ into in a more transcendent form so that they be seen, as if, for the first time. This is wonderfully illustrated in his books Miracles and Mere Christianity. It is here that we must ask some key questions: Should the metaphorical images of Christianity be destroyed? Are they necessary, absurd—even dangerous to our doctrines? Should we have more sophisticated imagery? Or do they point to a higher reality that cannot be grasped without them?

Lewis argues that ". . . the absurdity of images does not imply absurdity of doctrines" (75). Powerfully, he asserts that:

> If a man watches his own mind, I believe he will find that what profess to be specially advanced or philosophic conceptions of God are, in his thinking, always accompanied by vague images which, if inspected, would turn out to be even more absurd than the man-like images aroused by Christian theology (74).

Lewis states that "The truth is that if we are going to talk at all about things which are not perceived by the senses, we are forced to use language metaphorically" (72). He goes on to ask the question, that if a Galilean peasant were to really believe the images of Christ—literally and physically sitting down "at the right hand of the Father," and then got an education and discovered that "the Father had no right hand, and did not sit on a throne" would the primitive images really have mattered to him? (75).

Here Lewis makes one of the most profound statements that can be said about the actual reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of re-casting doctrine into an imaginary world, as he might in his fantasy, or science fiction works, he re-cast the shear reality of Christ as it is, in the transcendent realm—without the "primitive" anthropomorphic imagery of Scripture. In response to the question of whether the original images would have mattered to the Galilean peasant, Lewis thrusts us into a realm that is sudden, clear, and shocking:

> What mattered must have been the belief that a person whom he had known as a man in Palestine had, as a person, survived death and was now operating as the supreme agent of the supernatural Being who governed and maintained the whole field of reality. And that belief would survive substantially unchanged after the falsity of the earlier images had been recognized (75).

By introducing this astounding reality into one's thinking, the following corresponding verse of Scripture can never be seen in quite the same way: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (New American Standard Bible 1 Timothy 2:5).

Lewis repeatedly re-cast images into visions sometimes filled with nuances of myth, legend, and romance—such as when he calls the devil ". . . a Dark Power in the universe . . ." (Mere Christianity 50). He makes reference to the Incarnation as "God [landing] in enemy occupied territory in human form" (56). In terms of avoiding legalism in our on-going sanctification, to be Christ-like, ". . . is more like painting a portrait than like obeying a set of rules" (162). With this sort of mindset, all the familiar passages heard thousands of times, and all the prayers and usual responses, will now hold the substance and the deep reality of the unseen Christ.

This is demonstrated in one of the most poignant passages Lewis ever wrote, concerned the portrait of Our Lord as our Sacrifice, and Saviour. In the chapter "The Grand Miracle" in his book Miracles Lewis majestically sets the stage of the greatest heroic epic in the history of mankind, and does so with an unearthly vision of Christ that will keep the impact of the Almighty from slipping past us. He states that God came to earth from absolute being, into time and space—down, and down further still—into the very depths of humanity he has created (111). Lewis then creates this portrait:

> But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders (111).

Lewis's vision of the Almighty destroys the barriers of rote, reverence, and metaphor. Hidden under the vast, accumulated layers of complacent hearing, and response, false piety, and metaphorical imagery, is a God that is truly seen for the first time and therefore truly worshipped for the first time. In a final excerpt about his vision of Heaven, and Christianity being more than duties and rules and guilt and virtue, he humbly says:

> One has a glimpse of a country where they do not talk of those things, except perhaps as a joke. Every one there is filled full with what we should call goodness as a mirror is filled with light. But they do not call it goodness. They do not call it anything. They are not thinking of it. They are too busy looking at the source from which it comes. But this is near the stage where the road passes over the rim of the world. No one's eyes can see very far beyond that: lots of people's eyes can see further than mine (131).

C.S. Lewis has pulled back the curtain of a mundane, earthly reality and has ushered us into the eternal realm of a God and Christ beyond our limited sight. And he was able to do so, because the span of his own sight was so powerful, so far-reaching, and so clear.

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# C.S. Lewis, Apologist

Suzanne Ebel

*I think Gaius and Titius may have honestly misunderstood the pressing educational need of the moment. They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda—they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental—and they conclude that the best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defence against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments . . . a hard heart is no infallible protection against a soft head.*
*C.S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man*

C.S. Lewis wrote to his priest confidant, in a collection now known as The Latin Letters, that he felt, having reached his 50s, he had written all he had in him to say; that the present period of his life was the beginning of the end of his productive life. So he determined to go back to what he knew best, children's stories. A few years ago, nearing the completion of my doctoral work in Lewis's apologetics and about the same age, I had similar feelings. Nevertheless, C.S. Lewis continued to be an encouragement to me. As a Presbyterian Minister, I have been teaching adults and preaching in the church for over 25 years, and I have recently entered the Department of Religious Studies at the University of New Mexico, feeling honored to be teaching Lewis's apologetics in both arenas. In doing so I have found a whole new generation of students eager to learn how C.S. Lewis translates the Christian faith. I share Lewis's passion to try to break down intellectual barriers to the Christian faith, for this is no less a calling today than it was in the time he first wrote advice for doing apologetics.

In this paper, I want to remind us of Lewis's gifted balancing of reason and imagination as he translates the Christian faith. I will also review Lewis's principles for doing apologetics (that is, participating in the exercise of giving a reasoned defense of the Christian faith), with the primary focus being his defense of miracle, or the supernatural, since this was his starting point. His commitment to the supernatural aspect of Christianity formed the very center of his theology, especially with regard to his critique of the naturalistic worldview, still the most prevailing secular worldview of our day. I will also affirm the importance and relevance of Lewis's approach to doing apologetics in our own post-modern culture, even though he was writing in the sunset of the modern age. I am encouraged, in that during the most recent semester in my classes there have been "aha" moments for two very different individuals who upon hearing Lewis's words read have finally understood central truths of the faith they had struggled with for years.

One of Lewis's great gifts was his ability to appeal to both mind and heart, addressing the problem of God in both modernity and now post-modernity. Dr. Bruce Edwards, our keynote speaker at the last colloquium here at Taylor University, says it beautifully in his essay "A Thoroughly Converted Man: C.S. Lewis in the Public Square" in The Pilgrim's Guide: C.S. Lewis and the Art of Witness. He writes, "In Lewis we find a profound integration: an imagination married to reason and transformed by the revelation of the person of Christ . . . This thoroughly converted man offered the academic and the Christian world a scholarship that incarnates the ancient faith, and does so in the most disarming yet natural ways." (Mills 29) Christopher Mitchell wrote of Lewis that he wanted "to prepare the mind and imagination for the Christian vision." (5) A translation of the Christian faith characterized by these qualities makes C.S. Lewis particularly attractive in a climate of at least perceived heavy-handedness on the part of some Christian evangelists.

One of the advantages we have as fully entrenched post-moderns is that we are witnessing a renewed interest in the mystical, angelic, and/or spiritual world, and our mentor apologist may once again become central as an effective translator of Christian orthodoxy.

"Spirituality" is one of our culture's favorite words; yet as Lewis would quickly agree, spirituality without the Incarnation of Jesus Christ at the center is a dangerous spirituality indeed. Therefore, we need Lewis's apologetic guidance more than ever.

As I see it, the most pressing apologetic issue of the moment is that people don't "get it." The secular world, and some of the Christian church without realizing it, has fallen into the naturalistic premise that human beings and not God are the apex of the natural world, and thus God is regarded not as Lord but as a kind of benevolent landlord to be called upon in an emergency, but not the One to whom we are responsible to love and serve. Bypassing (or rejecting) the God of Revelation in Jesus Christ, people hold themselves distant from the God who is present with us and loves us. Consumerist materialism aids and abets this fear of intimacy and accountability. This naturalistic worldview, evolving since the Enlightenment of the 18th century toward an ever greater secular hostility to God, allows one to hold at bay the personal God who desires to forgive and reconcile human beings to himself, the God who is present among us and will not abandon his creatures. Father John Courtney Murray in his profound little book The Problem of God lays out the cultural landscape that has led us to the post-modern problem of what he labels "the will to atheism" in secular culture, and a rationalistic Christianity in the church. Thus, entering into the psychologically risky business of awakening the soul, the apologist does well to embrace Lewis's balanced understanding of the needs of both mind and heart.

Lewis said this (bifurcation) is very understandable in people who do not have revelation, for whom Christianity is not a supernatural faith. He knew this from his own experience, moving over the years from atheism, to theism, and finally with the help of his friend and colleague J.R.R. Tolkien, to submission to the Christian God. In the Narnia tales Lewis calls us into an imaginative mode which allows us the freedom to come or go. Just as children are less shy to talk with animals and puppets than with adults, so adults may find it less threatening to enter the spiritual world through the wardrobe.

Lesslie Newbigin affirms in his book The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society that the imagination is at work, however, not only in the literary and theological mind but also in the heart and mind of the scientist. If this is so, how does the apologist re-orient the scientist's imagination to God rather than solely to natural phenomena? How does the apologist appeal to the naturalistically-formed mind of the youthful materialist of the twenty-first century? What does the apologist have to say to today's Christian mothers who cannot say why a liturgical statement in one of their children's Berenstain Bears books, "Nature is all there is, ever was, or ever will be," is antithetical to the Christian faith. As one Christian education leader asked, "How do we wake these people up?"

That is also my question. How do we wake people up? Interestingly, the church in New Mexico consists of people from one end of the philosophical spectrum to the other, from the nuclear physicists of Los Alamos Labs who sit next to me in a choral group in Santa Fe, to the moms who teach Sunday School in the mainline churches I have pastored, to the Buddhist salon owner who cuts my hair every two months, to mature Christian adults in my classes and pews. How do we talk to them about the Christian God as the One and Only God unique among all other religions? And teach them to talk to others? How do we help them reconcile their heads and hearts, and heal the schism between spirit and matter, between intellect and imagination. How do we move from a "salad bar Christianity," as Charles Colson called it (Christianity Today, 80) to a worldview which embodies an understanding of the Christian faith. More than any other apologist I know of, C.S. Lewis effectively communicates across all these categories and cultural barriers, from the housewife to the nuclear physicist.

Lewis was right when he said that in all his conversations about Christianity he would insist on being uncompromising that Christianity is a supernatural faith. This is a first principle of apologetics for Lewis. Supernaturalism sets Christianity apart from all other religions. It is his key argument, upon which all other arguments are based.

Everyone enters a discussion with some presuppositions. Many do not state them clearly, even if they are aware of them. Lewis does—a legacy from his tutor W. T. Kirkpatrick. He says simply and firmly that to exclude the supernatural is to cease to be Christian. This is his number one principle of apologetics. We are probably all familiar with his two greatest visions of the supernatural character of the Christian faith; one in his essay "The Grand Miracle" in his book Miracles, and his reasoned argument for the claims of Jesus Christ in Mere Christianity.

Second, whatever one wants to "defend," Lewis says, one must draw boundaries around it, beyond which it would become something different from what is being defended. Having established that boundaries of definition and clarity are required in a defense of a doctrine, Lewis calls to account those who go beyond the boundaries; for example, challenging priests in one of his talks for claiming their titles as priests while dishonestly espousing other than central Christian doctrines. He took liberal theologians heavily to task for this. The supernatural faith Lewis espouses is characterized by the "faith preached by the Apostles, attested by the Martyrs, embodied by the creeds, expounded by the Fathers." (90) Whatever any one of us may think about God or man, our thinking as apologists, he says, is to be guided by orthodox Christianity, and it is not our business to defend our or

anyone else's *opinions.* The apologist must always distinguish between his personal opinion and God's.

Close on the heels of this, however, comes a third principle of apologetics which is that we must keep up with current thinking on a subject, so as to be able to answer the questions it poses to us with real Christian answers. He encourages young people to go into their chosen professions in various subjects, so we can have "more little books by Christians on other subjects" with a latent Christian message, rather than "more little books about Christianity." (92) Following the same line of thinking, he says, "Our faith is not very likely to be shaken by any book on Hinduism. But if, whenever we read an elementary book on Geology . . . we found its implications were Hindu, that would shake us." (93)

Another principle of Lewis's is that it is our business to present what is timeless, but in contemporary language. It reminds me of something one of my earliest adult Sunday School teachers at Menlo Park Presbyterian said after reading the third chapter of Titus: "In other words, God don't make no junk!" This startling use of contemporary slang made an indelible impression. Of course, these are words Lewis himself would never have used. Instead, he would write: "All this time the Lion's song, and his stately prowl, to and fro, backwards and forwards, was going on . . . When a line of dark firs sprung up on a ridge . . . they were connected with a series of deep, prolonged notes which the Lion had sung a second before. And when he burst into a rapid series of light notes, . . . primroses suddenly appeared in every direction. Thus . . . when you listened to his song you *heard* the things he was making up: when you looked round you, you *saw* them. This was so exciting there was no time to be afraid." (The Magician's Nephew, ch. 9) The profound theological insight into creation is made wondrous in its childlike simplicity. We enjoy his uncanny ability to write or speak in the language of his audience in a different way in his letters to Mary, a hypochondriac American woman with whom Lewis corresponded over many years. In these letters we find a thoughtful and sensitive personal give and take filled with orthodox Christian theology. From simple letters to sophisticated essays, Lewis models for us the attempt to understand and sympathize with his audience.

In his essay "The Funeral of a Great Myth" (Christian Reflections 89) Lewis demolishes brilliantly the power of the Myth of Developmentalism in popular evolutionary theory. But at the end of the argument, he reminds the reader, sympathizing with the desire to embrace such a myth: "It is our painful duty to wake the world from an enchantment." (93). Even though he has debunked the myth, he does not leave his opponent crushed, but tries to find common ground with him. He writes, "In the meantime, we must treat the Myth with respect. It was all (on a certain level) nonsense: but a man would be a dull dog if he could not feel the thrill and charm of it." (93) Because the Myth of Developmentalism is an offshoot of a true scientific theory of Evolution, Lewis enters with sympathy into the argument, but then invites us to consider the true Evolution:

> People ask when the next step in evolution—the step to something beyond man—will happen. But on the Christian view, it has happened already. In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us. The Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us; just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright, but becomes bright because the sun shines on it. (Mere Christianity, Bk 2, ch. 5)

Recently, after reading this passage in one of my classes a parishioner who is a scientist exclaimed: "That is the coolest thing I have ever heard!"

For Lewis, the divinity of Christ must be upheld even before addressing and defending the existence of God. Lewis observed that many arguers on the subject of the Incarnation would begin with the idea that Jesus was a "great human teacher" who was deified by his misguided followers. Lewis says we must not only drive home Jesus's own words and claims about himself (which of course he does brilliantly in Mere Christianity) but that we must not neglect the historicity of the scriptures—the Gospels.

> Another point is that you would have to regard the accounts of the Man as being legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that the Gospels are not legend. They are not artistic enough to be legends. From an imaginative point of view, they are clumsy; they don't work up to things properly. There are no conversations that I know of in ancient literature like the Fourth Gospel. There is nothing, even in modern literature, until about a hundred years ago when the realistic novel came into existence. The authors write things simply because they had seen them. The strangest story of all is the story of the Resurrection. Something perfectly new in the history of the Universe had happened. Christ had defeated death. The Resurrection narratives record how a totally new mode of being has arisen in the Universe. Something new had appeared in the Universe: as new as the first coming of organic life. ("What Are We To Make of Jesus Christ," God in the Dock 157-160)

Next, Lewis challenges the apologist to keep before the audience the question of Truth. Here is the greatest challenge to the post-modern mind. People think we recommend Christianity because it is *good*, not because it is *true*. We have to keep coming back to Truth over and over, he challenges.

Finally, and once again, Lewis urges that we are never to water down Christianity by excluding the supernatural. "There must be no pretense that you can have it with the Supernatural left out." It is *the* one religion from which we cannot separate the miraculous. "You must frankly argue for Supernaturalism from the very outset." (99) He writes:

> The question is . . . What are we to make of Jesus Christ? You must accept or reject the Story. The things he says are very different from what any other teacher has said. Others say, 'This is the truth about the Universe. This is the way you ought to go,' but He says, 'I am the Truth, and the Way, and the Life.' He says, 'No man can reach absolute reality, except through me. Try to retain your own life and you will be inevitably ruined. Give yourself away and you will be saved.' If anything whatever is keeping you from God and from Me, whatever it is, throw it away. If it is your eye, pull it out. If it is your hand, cut if off. If you put yourself first you will be last. Come to Me, everyone who is carrying a heavy load, I will set that right. Your sins, all of them, are wiped out, I can do that. I am Re-birth, I am Life. Eat Me, drink Me, I am your Food. And finally, do not be afraid, I have overcome the whole Universe.' That is the issue. (157-160)

In conclusion, C.S. Lewis has bequeathed to us wise principles for doing apologetics in our own time. He addresses the central topics one must defend as orthodox Christianity, and he urges stands on which there must be no compromise as an apologist., while balancing his appeal with both reason and imagination. Having laid out brilliant and winsome arguments, however, Lewis urges the apologist to keep sight of what must always be finally uppermost in our minds and hearts: ". . . (W)e apologists take our lives in our hands and can be saved only by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments, as from our intellectual counters, into the Reality—from Christian apologetics into Christ Himself. That also is why we need one another's continual help—*oremus pro invicem*." ("Christian Apologetics," God in the Dock 103)

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# Realism, Fantasy and a Critique of Nineteenth-Century Society in George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*

Jean Webb

George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind,* (1871) can be situated between two seemingly opposite lines of literary evolution in English literature in the nineteenth century: the realist social problem novel, as exemplified by Elizabeth Gaskell's novel for adults, *Mary Barton*, (1848) and the burgeoning of fantasy writing for children in the 1870s, for example Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863), and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1864). Kingsley and Carroll have been designated under the title of writers of 'Nonsense,' however, embedded in their work is a critique of 19th century society. Similarly MacDonald is perceived as a writer of fantasy, and similarly MacDonald engages in a philosophical and moral discussion and critique of the contemporary Victorian English society.

In her novel *Mary Barton* Elizabeth Gaskell was intent upon raising awareness of the deplorable conditions under which the poor lived in Manchester in the 1840s. Such conditions were also recorded by Freidrich Engels in his journeys around England at the time[1]. In terms of design of the city, Manchester was particular in that due to the ergonomic patterns it need not be necessary for the rich to come into contact with the poor, since they lived and worked in separate areas. Gaskell was married to a Unitarian Minister, thus her work would have taken her into the places shunned by others of the middle classes. She also demonstrated a high level of moral and social conscience and a sensibility towards the ignored poor. Benjamin Disraeli had previously brought such division to the notice of the reading public in 1845 in his novel *Sybil or The Two Nations* stating that England was comprised of two nations, the rich and the poor.

In her Preface to *Mary Barton* Elizabeth Gaskell ponders on the lives of the poor as follows:

> I had always felt a deep sympathy with the care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want, tossed to and fro by circumstance, apparently in a greater degree than other men. (*Mary Barton* xxxv)
>
> . . . I bethought me how deep might be the innocence of some of those who elbowed me daily in the streets of the town in which I resided. (*Mary Barton* xxxvi)

Gaskell demonstrates an humanitarian approach to the poor, setting the lives of her characters in the turbulent social and political contexts of the 1840s which was a decade of boom and bust in manufacturing. The Chartist Movement was also pushing for the franchise for working class men. Gaskell's characters are fully engaged in the political action, the tension and understandable dissatisfaction which led to riot and social unrest. Again she records this awareness in her Preface:

> I saw they were sore and more irritable against the rich, the even tenor of whose seemingly happy lives appeared to increase the anguish caused by the lottery-like nature of their own. (*Mary Barton* xxxv)

Thus her protagonists struggle with the poverty of their everyday working lives and strive for the movement towards greater political equality. Disraeli also focussed on political economy and the impact such had on the working classes. Both writers had strong moral and humanitarian drives underpinning their work, which they integrated into the realist depiction of their characters and the decisions they made.

By the 1870s some movement had been made in the improvement of working conditions and the franchise, however, there was still much to be done, especially in social conditions for the poor. Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies,* (1863), brought the plight of the child chimney sweeps to the notice of the reading public. Kingsley's novel is a combination of realism, fairytale and the surreal, as the narrator observes Tom on his journey of moral redemption from boy chimney sweep, to water baby, to a Great Man of Science. *The Water Babies* is also a critique of nineteenth century society, in terms of the cruelties and working conditions for these child sweeps (for some of them were girls), and of the morality of the contemporary world. A great work in the genre of fantasy and surrealism, Kingsley's intention is not to explore the nature of the imagination as was that of George MacDonald, who, amongst other matters, was concerned with morality, both social and individual, and the nature of humanity. Kingsley's fantasy world

was a parallel one, for characters and related events from the 'real' world are transposed and continued into the fantasy creation which translates the debates of the period, and those Kingsley was having with himself concerning Darwinism, for example, and notions of creation. Kingsley does not offer any practical solutions. His answers lie in the morality of the individual; the moral education of Tom. In *At the Back of the North Wind*, the agent for change is Diamond, who is morally pure and innocent. MacDonald's world of fantasy is better described as an adjunct world, for Diamond moves to the back of the North Wind, yet the happenings there are not observed by the reader, nor can Diamond clearly transpose such into reality. This country lies within the imagination of the reader, and is recalled by Diamond through the poetry and music he brings back with him as a memory of his experiences.

George MacDonald's essay 'The Fantastic Imagination' (1893) can be read in conjunction with *At the Back of the North Wind*, as a discussion of the imagination which enlightens the reading of MacDonald's novel for children. In 'The Fantastic Imagination' he writes:

> The natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them in the way of presentment any more than in the way of use
>
> a man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws ('FI' 5)

which is what he does in the novel, both in his realist creation and in the world beyond the North Wind. MacDonald's discursive thoughts relate to the narrative structure of *At the Back of the North Wind*. There are no magical happenings which change the real world for the better; all change is derived from a logical cause and effect mode conducive to realist writing. The inclusion of the North Wind enables MacDonald to invent his 'own little world' for the interaction of Diamond and the North Wind in order to explore the otherness of the imagination; yet even that world does not transgress the laws which govern over both reality and imagination, as will be discussed further. What is enhanced by Diamond's interaction with the North Wind is his ability to effect change by the ambiance of his personality. Despite the desperations of poverty into which Diamond and his family descend, Diamond creates harmony. Here there is a direct relationship with MacDonald's theorising on the writing of fantasy:

> His world once invented, the highest law that comes next into play is, that there shall be harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist; ('FI' 6)

The root of such harmony is with Diamond's close relationship with the natural world, epitomised in the personification of the North Wind.

In his introductory paragraph MacDonald emphasises the difference between his conceptualisation of the back of the North Wind and that recorded by Herodotus, which suggests that it was 'so comfortable' that 'a people who lived there' 'drowned themselves' (*NW* 11). A playful implication here is that Herodotus, who is regarded as a founding father of historians, actually got it wrong. This is especially ironic in that the Victorian period was one particularly interested in the formulation of the writing of history, with the work of Thomas Carlyle et al. A further implication is that an excess of 'comfort' cannot be transposed into the real world, which is certainly not the case in MacDonald's text, for Diamond brings great comfort to all who know him.

Diamond's sleeping accommodation in a room over the coach-house where Old Diamond, the horse is stabled is not comfortable by modern standards but it is so for the boy because he is in close proximity to nature. He luxuriates in the warmth and smell of the hay and the security of the horse below. MacDonald's description of the flimsiness of the boards which separate his sleeping quarters from the outside world and the domain of the North Wind is emphasised by the image of the wind slipping through the slit in the boards made by a penknife like a 'cat after a mouse' (*NW* 11). The closeness to nature is thereby introduced and gently stressed from the very beginnings of the narrative. Furthermore, and more importantly, Diamond is closer to the horse rather than to his family in those private hours, when he settles and sleeps, and it is with the horse that he shares a close understanding and relationship. Even their name is shared. Horse and boy; boy and horse become synonymous, as it were. Yet interestingly, MacDonald elected to limit this relationship to one which refused to enter into say, magical conversations between the two. The equine Diamond is an instrumental factor in the realist narrative, not the fantasy. The greater force of Nature embodied in the North Wind which surrounds both boy and horse is the conduit into the world of the imagination.

Diamond's first experience of meeting North Wind is one which develops through natural association. She emerges as a presence firstly in her 'normally' natural state:

> The wind was rising again, and getting very loud, and full of rushes and whistles. (*NW* 13)

The logical development is the emergence of a voice, that of North Wind herself. Structurally the narrative is rational, easing the reader from realism into fantasy and the imagination. MacDonald abides by the classical unities of time, place and character, in strong contrast to

the fantasy creations of his contemporary, Lewis Carroll whose *Alice in Wonderland* certainly has it's own logical construction which is based on syllogism and moving beyond the constraints of time and place[2]. MacDonald's technique dissolves those boundaries, fusing together the real and fantasy worlds, thus conveying that sense of the imaginary/fantasy space which can be in the actual as well as an-other place.

From his first sight of North Wind, Diamond is 'entranced with her mighty beauty' (*NW* 18). The physical description MacDonald assigns to North Wind brilliantly produces a solidity out of the wind which as Christina Rossetti observed in her poem 'Who has seen the wind?' (1893) could only normally be materialised in the effect on objects, such as the trees. MacDonald's personification of the wind is a combination of physical attributes, such as her flowing hair and the description of her face which looked 'out of the midst of it like a moon out of a cloud' (*NW* 18).

Their conversation had circulated upon Diamond's unusual name, which North Wind thought 'funny' (*NW* 16), a response to which Diamond objects. The expectation of the reader in association with the word 'diamond' is to think of the precious stone, however, for Diamond his connection is with the 'great and good horse' (*NW* 17). Both of them have to come to know each other, further than the representation of their names; as MacDonald comments: 'For to know a person's name is not always to know the person's self' (*NW* 17),—which in many ways is the crux of the text, for MacDonald is creating a child protagonist who will mean more than the materialistic associations with his name. In fact the character of Diamond is a rejection of the materialism and capitalism which drove and blighted human experience in the Victorian period, and which in many ways still does today.

North Wind logically has to be a beautiful woman, for as MacDonald wrote in 'The Fantastic Imagination':

> Law is the soil in which alone beauty will grow; beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed; and you may, if you will, call Imagination the tailor that cuts her garments to fit her' ('FI' 6).

Beauty, Law and the Imagination are fused together in the figure of North Wind. Through their interaction Diamond is initiated and educated into such understanding, which he will disseminate to those with whom he communicates. Following his first meeting with North Wind, Diamond is found in the courtyard and taken into the warmth of the drawing-room, for they think he has been sleep-walking. He mistakenly thinks that Miss Coleman is his North Wind, and is then disappointed. Here the fusion between reality and imagination is emphasized; the transposition of the world of fantasy back into reality, which is then in itself unsatisfactory. The process of moving into the fantasy world is gradual and logical: a child's dream, perhaps, on a stormy night, or the initiation into an other worldliness which exists outside normality.

Diamond's next meeting with North Wind is pre-figured by his return to the yard where North Wind had left him. Having been confined to home because of bad weather for a week, his experience of going outside to play before sunset is one of a bountiful re-union with nature. He is described as 'flying from the door like a bird from its cage' (*NW* 31). MacDonald provides a luscious description of the sunset over the stable-yard:

> And Diamond thought that, next to his own home, he had never seen any place he would like so much to live in as that sky. (*NW* 31).

MacDonald is bringing together the elements of the narrative in a logical construction, so that it is acceptable when Diamond is so happy at the back of the North Wind, and that he is deeply embedded in the love of his family. What is also emphasized is the Romantic relationship with nature. Diamond is a Romantic child; he is emotionally affected by his natural surroundings; an innocent who moves from innocence to experience through both his relationships with North Wind, in terms of the imagination, the spiritual, and with those he meets and affects in his 'real' life.

The world of the imagination is brought into Diamond's consciousness and confirmed as being part of his reality when he returns to the yard and remembers 'how the wind had driven him to the same spot on the night of his dream' (*NW* 31). He stoops down to look at a primrose, 'a dwarfish thing,' focussing on the diminutive size of the plant, which is itself stirred by a 'little wind' (*NW* 31). The centre of the primrose is described as being 'one eye that the dull black wintry earth had opened to look at the sky with' (*NW* 31). In his own way, Diamond will be an eye through which his family and close companions will be 'able to look at the sky' or rather 'into' the sky when he recounts later his journey to the back of the North Wind. Diamond will become the 'eye' through which others may see.

The emphasis on size in this passage is an instrumental introduction to the changing size and power of the North Wind. She is diminutive at sunset, in this case, and will grow to a mighty raging storm, as we all change in emotional power at different points of experience. The primrose acts as a referent in the later conversation which Diamond has with North Wind:

> 'But you're no bigger than me.'
> 'Do you think I care how big or how little I am? Didn't you see me this evening. I was less then.'
> 'No. Where was you?'
> 'Behind the leaves of the primrose. Didn't you see them blowing?'

'Yes' (*NW* 33).

North Wind's ability to change size is a responsive approach to the demands of natural conditions, rather than the happenstance of changes in body size to which Carroll's Alice is subjected. Diamond is also, through such conversations and experiences with North Wind, learning of the multiplicity of the self. As an aside, I also think that the analogy with the North Wind and the variations in levels of energy in response to situations, parallels the levels of energy, both emotional and intellectual which one may feel 'inside one's head' at different times, and the energies created by engagement with the creative imagination. Physically, emotionally and spiritually we are not static beings.

North Wind is certainly not static, as said. Diamond accompanies her on a journey through the environs, as her energy increases she becomes a 'full-grown girl' (35) and then a wolf which frightens a drunken woman who should have been caring for a child. Here MacDonald incorporates a direct moral warning against the excesses of drink, whilst also including a discussion of the perception of 'good' and 'bad' and the differences between person and necessary action. Following her appearance as a wolf North Wind comments to Diamond:

> 'Good people see good things; bad people, bad things.'
> 'Then are you a bad thing?'
> 'No. For *you* see me, Diamond, dear,' said the girl, and she looked down at him, and Diamond saw the loving eyes of the great lady beaming from the depths of her falling hair.' (*NW* 36).

Diamond's relationship with the North Wind is an educative one. In the episodes in the 'real' world Diamond is given broadening experiences which he may not fully understand, because they lie outside of the rationality in which Diamond can operate, and also how as human beings we cannot 'know' the reasons for everything. Time spent with North Wind is not always comfortable and easy; he has to learn to trust her, to develop a Keatsian negative capability in not being able to 'know' the rational answers to natural disasters, such as the sinking of the passenger ship. The emotional veracity of MacDonald's writing communicates how Diamond has to struggle with his doubts and fears, until he can fully trust North Wind. Initially lessons to develop this confidence in her are placed in the real world, later this trust will transpose directly to the imagined world at the back of the North Wind, where there will be no direct contact with recognised reality. MacDonald thereby takes his reader on a process of learning as he does with Diamond, and in so doing to learn more about urban society and morality, or in many cases the lack of it. Trust is established through the physical relationship between Diamond and the North Wind. On, for example, the stormy night in London, she weaves her hair together to make a warm nest for him.

> It was just like a pocket, or like the shawl in which gypsy women carry their children. (*NW* 38).

North Wind is a 'natural' nomad, a gypsy of the sky. Diamond is technically flying with her, in the quasi-situation of being her baby cradled on her back, safe from the elemental furore below, which she is creating.

> There was a great roaring, for the wind was dashing against London like a sea; but at North Wind's back, Diamond, of course felt nothing of it at all.(*NW* 39).

On being questioned as to the cause of the noise, North Wind replies gently:

> 'The noise of my besom. I am the old woman that sweeps the cobwebs from the sky; only I'm busy with the floor now.'

The logical link is established between this moment with North Wind and seeing the little sweeper girl, struggling against the wind, dragging her broom, for it is Nanny who will figure so greatly later in the realist part of the narrative. Diamond asks if North Wind will help the child, however, at that time there are other duties for his guardian companion, who answers saying that she must not leave her work. His question is one born of his compassionate nature:

> 'But why shouldn't you be kind to her?'

North Wind points out that she is actually helping the child in one way by 'sweeping the wicked smells away' (*NW* 41).

It will later be the influence of Diamond's kindness which saves Nanny's life and brings her a better way of living. The implied lesson communicated by North Wind is that there are actions which are appropriate at certain times, and others which are not. Here North Wind is employing a broad brush, to cleanse the city; Diamond will later employ his compassionate nature to, as it were, cleanse little Nanny's life of the tawdry lifestyle with her grandmother. MacDonald is also, through such narrative sequencing, demonstrating the cause and effect between events which may seem minor, or meetings which may be fleeting, or coincidental and then develop into important and life changing relationships.

In order to fully be prepared for the ways in which Diamond's life will change, for example, when he takes over his father's cab driving business, Diamond has to learn physical courage. The early episode in the

cathedral is where North Wind tests Diamond; on trusting her; trusting his own senses and trusting his own measure of courage. North Wind leads him into one of the towers and onto a gallery to wait for her while she has to go about her duty of sinking the ship, He is, understandably, greatly afraid of falling. North Wind questions his seemingly irrational fear, for he had not quavered when nestled in her hair traversing the skies but a few moments previously. Although he is now being held by her he is upset because he is walking on his own legs, which might slip. Even though he directly states that he does not like this albeit knowing that she would be down after him and save him should he slip, North Wind lets go of his hand, wherewith Diamond screams and is 'bent double with terror.' 'She left the words, 'Come after me,' sounding in his ears.' (*North Wind* 68).

The Biblical echoes here are very strong of Christ calling his disciples to demonstrate their faith in Him, to leave their normal lives and follow. The phrasing of this short sentence is also interesting, for the situation of the command is within Diamond as a physical presence. MacDonald could have more conventionally written: 'North Wind called Diamond to follow her,' however, this phrase would not have carried the emotive weight of the fear Diamond is entrapped by and which is within him. At such heightened traumatic moments, one does experience differently; time slows, sound becomes transposed into one's physicality, that fusion of event and emotion and the body. Diamond does survive and 'pass' this test, for he walks alone, whilst realising that he had been helped by the wind blowing into his face to make him brave. She did not hold him, but she had not left him. As North Wind says afterwards:

> 'You had to be taught what courage was. And you couldn't know what it was without feeling it: therefore it was given you. But don't you feel as if you would try to be brave yourself next time?'
> 'Yes, I do. But trying is not much.'
> 'Yes, it is—a very great deal, for it is a beginning. And a beginning is the greatest thing of all.' (*NW* 70).

North Wind passes on great wisdom to the young Diamond. The narrative structure of MacDonald's novel also imparts the philosophical perceptions which he discusses in 'The Fantastic Imagination.' Diamond has overcome a great fear of falling; he has discovered courage within himself, a courage which was dormant, for as MacDonald states in his essay:

> 'The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to raising his consciousness, is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself.' ('FI' 9)

The conversation between North Wind and Diamond which follows the incident on the ledge demonstrates that there cannot be absolute understanding of all states, events and consequences. They discuss how the breath of North Wind had the power to awaken courage in Diamond:

> I knew it would make you strong. . . . But how my breath has that power I cannot tell. It was put into me when I was made. That is all I know.' (*NW* 70).

Interestingly North Wind 'knows' the power, but cannot 'tell'; she is unable to articulate an explanation. Here MacDonald returns both to the rationality of his writings on the creation of the imaginary, that certain laws cannot be traversed, there has to be a logic within the created world and also to a demonstration by North Wind of negative capability. To 'know' is all she and thus Diamond, need 'to know.' As MacDonald states:

> In physical things a man may invent; in moral things he must obey—and take the laws with him into his invented world as well. ('FI' 7)

Morally North Wind would have misinformed or misled Diamond had she made up a reason for why her breath has so much power. By honestly sharing her 'ignorance' North Wind refrains from falsely setting herself up as all-powerful and all-knowing.

By this stage in the novel MacDonald has established a completely trusting relationship between the boy and the wind. The realist context of the harshness and inequality of nineteenth century working

class life in London has also been introduced, at this point with some distance from Diamond himself, for it is later in the narrative when Diamond takes over his father's position as cab driver. The reader thus far, has an insight into Diamond's strengths and frailties, and is, in other words, getting to 'know' Diamond. High incidence of child illness and mortality was a sad reality during the nineteenth century. MacDonald's own experience and that of his family is testament to the ravages of tuberculosis, for example. Diamond's first visit to the back of the North Wind is associated with his being very ill, of the fragility of child health during the period.

MacDonald's rendering of these sections of the novel take reality—serious illness and near-death experiences, and death itself—and explore that which we cannot know through the imaginative process. Diamond is taken by his mother to Sandwich on the coast to recuperate, and to try to prevent his illness becoming more acute. He meets North Wind again in a toyshop, where she stirs the sails of a windmill. That afternoon Diamond falls very ill. He sleeps and in his doing so 'found himself in a cloud of North Wind's hair' (*NW* 82). Body, elements and sky-scape are merged. Diamond wants to go to the back of the north wind. North Wind explains that it is not possible for her to go there, since she always blows in a southerly direction, from the north, and so she 'never gets farther than the outer door' (*NW* 83). This is very logical, whilst being conceptually puzzling and disturbing, her namesake 'home' is one she can never enter; a place of 'otherness' for the North Wind herself. The way she can reach the boundary is explained by her as follows:

> ' . . . I have only to consent to be nobody, and there I am. I draw into myself, and there I am on the doorstep' (*NW* 83).

She has to agree—with whom the reader does not know, nor needs to know—to give up her body, to become 'no-body,' and to relinquish her identity. The image of withdrawal is very powerful. When serious illness overtakes the individual, there is such a withdrawal from the energy of life, as portrayed by the activities of North Wind, and following the increasing withdrawal into the self, which then ceases to exist as a projection into the social world, as the patient lies in a state of suspended animation. They are a sick body with a silenced 'self.' Diamond travels north by sea with the aid and company of North Wind. On reaching their destination North Wind is disappearing:

> Diamond stared at her in terror, for he saw that her form and face were growing, not small, but transparent, like something dissolving not in water, but in light. He could see the side of the blue cave through her very heart.(*NW* 88).

North Wind is landscape, ice, light and nothingness, her being is all around and within her, yet she is not. Looking into the heart of light, one has all light, yet 'sees' nothing. Interestingly, for me, this pre-figures T.S. Eliot's lines in *The Wasteland*:

> . . . I could not
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I new nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
> *Oed' und leer das Meer.*
> (trans. Desolate and empty the sea[3]) (*The Wasteland* 11 40-43)

Eliot's post-World War I image is negative and without hope, in contrast to the experiences Diamond brings back with him. At this stage, however, before he has entered that country at the back of the north wind, he has to surmount his terror, and feels that North Wind does not care for him any more.

> 'Yes, I do. Only I can't show it. All my love is down at the bottom of my heart. But I feel it bubbling there.' (*NW* 90).

This sums up the dilemma of the human condition, when feelings are suppressed for various reasons and the expression of love becomes concealed, lying dormant and inanimate.

MacDonald has an honesty which is communicated through the narrative voice. He addresses the reader directly, as seemingly the omniscient, all-knowing narrator, yet what he has to say is that he does not know.

> I have now come to the most difficult part of my story. And why? Because I do not know enough about it. (*NW* 91).

The narrative role is given over to Diamond who has been to the back of the north wind, whereas the 'official' narrator has not. Diamond, at this point, becomes an unreliable narrator,

> Because, when he came back, he had forgotten a great deal, and what he did remember was very hard to tell. Things there are so very different from things here! (*NW* 91).

Diamond's problem is that things are so different that he has no reliable referents.

> The people there do not speak the same language for one thing. Indeed, Diamond insisted that there they do not speak at all. I do not think he was right, but it may have appeared so to Diamond. (*NW* 91).

The conversational, confiding tone of 'the' narrator is somewhat amusing, whilst also introducing a clash of power and status, between the adult narrator and the child narrator. The knowledge of Diamond is actually being overruled by someone who cannot know the truth. 'The' narrator returns to the techniques derived of History and of Law: accounts given by different people which verify 'the' Truth, yet in truth, verify difference according to experience. Yet again, return to 'The Fantastic Imagination' raises the philosophical and, indeed, political position of the differences in reading according to the individual reader: the liberation from a singular mode of reading and understanding.

> Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another. ('FI' 7)

Diamond's account of his experience has to be recounted by using referents with which *he* is familiar. His guide, North Wind, cannot be there with him. This has to be his interpretation and translation. The referents pertaining to the elements and landscape which MacDonald has used throughout which have enabled the description of North Wind do not exist in the same form for Diamond to use:

> The sun too had vanished; but that was no matter, for there was plenty of a certain still rayless light. Where it came from he never found out; but he thought it belonged to the country itself. . . . He insisted that if it (the river) did not sing tunes in people's ears, it sung tunes in their heads, and proof of which I may mention that, in the troubles which followed, Diamond was often heard singing. . . . One of the tunes the river at the back of the north wind sung. (*NW* 93).

The omniscient narrator is reclaiming his author-ity from Diamond by asserting that he has proof of the un-provable. MacDonald refuses to take an 'easy option' with this section of recounting Diamond's memories, he could have defined the landscape at the back of the north wind, by using oppositions in a parallel world, much as Carroll did in his reversed world in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Instead he aligns this world beyond with this one, yet shifts the 'concreteness,' giving softness to the landscape, where the river flows through grass, not rocks. There is also an emphasis on interiority as the river sings tunes 'in' the head, fusing body and landscape as he has done so before.

When Diamond is back with his mother following his visit to the back of the north wind which was in the real world of physicality a severe illness, she reads poetry to him. Despite her efforts to find a better one than the 'nonsense' she has before her, 'the wind blew the leaves rustling back to the same verses.' MacDonald is again fusing landscape, language, reality and imagination. The leaves of the book become as leaves from a tree, wind-blown and rustling.

> Now I do not know what the mother read, but this is what Diamond heard, or thought afterwards that he had heard. (*NW* 110).

The long poem is a harmonious fusion, where one element of nature flows into another linked by the repetition of words and rhythmic sounds. In his essay MacDonald discusses the relationship between music and words. His imagined opponent retorts:

> "But words are not music; words at least are meant and fitted to carry a precise meaning!" ('FI' 8)

To which MacDonald answers:

> It is very seldom indeed that they carry the exact meaning of any user of them! . . . Words are live things that may be variously employed to various ends. . . . They are things to be put together like the pieces of a dissected map, or to arrange like the notes on a stave. ('FI' 8)

The elements of the landscape which occur in the poem—the river, shallows, hollows, dust, and daisies for example—are like the pieces of a map which becomes populated by the nesting activities of the swallows and the gamboling lambs. The river runs throughout 'singing' this natural celebration of life and provides the musicality like a recurrent theme in a composition. Linguistically the poem returns to an almost repeated patterns of words like the subtle change in harmony in music. For example:

> for he loves her best
> with the nicest cakes
> which the sunshine bakes (*NW* 111).

becomes a little later:

> for the nests they make
> with the clay they cake
> in the sunshine bake (*NW* 113).

The emphasis in the poem is on the musicality and harmony, rather than rationality. The patterning is repetitive and circular, the poem finishing with the lines

> and its all in the wind
> that blows from behind (*NW* 115).

MacDonald is using language in the place of music, for as he states in 'The Fantastic Imagination, using a common Romantic association between the Aeolian harp, the wind and the imagination:

> 'where his (the writer's) object is to move by suggestion, to cause to imagine, then let him assail the soul of the reader as the wind assails the Aeolian harp' ('FI' 10)

Approximately one third of the novel has been given to Diamond to reach this point, where he can realise the country at the back of the north wind in an extended poem which narrates the harmonies of nature. When he sleeps he sleeps in that country, yet at this point MacDonald returns the reader to the actualities of nineteenth century working class life, and a realist narrative. Reality and the imagination become fused through Diamond, for he is active in the domain of the working cabbies whilst increasingly strongly 'living' in the country at the back of the north wind. The result is that the enhanced experience of Diamond increases the effect he has upon the working and social communities.

Diamond's father's working situation has changed and he decides to go into business for himself as a cab driver. Here the impact upon changes in working conditions become evident, and the emphasis moves to the self-employed, in accord with the ethos of Samuel Smiles *Book of Self Help*. The responsibility falls more greatly upon the individual to effect change in their lives and on those of others. The responsibilities of Diamond's parents per se also increase with the birth of a new baby. Diamond extends great love, celebrating joy with his little brother, demonstrating a feminine caring approach. Diamond also eventually assumes the position of bread-winner for the family when he takes up the cab driving business due to his father's illness. Whilst scrupulously honest and hard working he is also a good business man, ensuring, politely, that he is paid a fair remuneration for his work (*NW 178)*. His loving, caring and socially responsible attitude is thus effective in both feminine and masculine roles. Through Diamond's meeting Mr. Raymond, a gentleman, Diamond's father becomes aware of the importance for Diamond to be taught to read. MacDonald's decision in introducing Diamond to literacy emphasises the holistic approach embedded in this novel: that dissemination of imaginative experiences is related to literature and thereby the necessity for the child to be able to read. It also illustrates the need for the adult to take responsibility for all aspects of child welfare and development. However good, loving and responsible Diamond is derived from the influence of the North Wind and his visits to the back of the north wind, his innocence needs to be accompanied by experience and knowledge which will serve him in this real world.

The shift into the living conditions of the working classes with the visit to the slum cellar dwelling of Nanny and Sal, and events of Diamond's working life take the reader into an oppositional world of violence and ugliness in comparison with the serenity, beauty and love embodied in the country at the back of the north wind. However, Diamond's influence variously enables good to out and positive change to come about, not only enacted by himself, but also by the adults who are influenced by him, especially pertinently Mr. Raymond, the rich man. Whereas in Gaskell's *Mary Barton* there is a physical as well as a social divide between the classes, in MacDonald's novel the wealthy are seen to act in a philanthropic vein, bringing relief to the poor. There is no 'jealousy' extended towards the rich as with Gaskell's observation, for they willingly work together. Diamond could also be said to be the embodiment of the 'deep innocence' Gaskell observed in working class people she 'elbowed' in the street. Diamond's spiritual benevolence derived of his innocence, is transposed into material action, which is reminiscent of the innocent character Gluck in John Ruskin's fairy tale 'King of the Golden River' (written 1841, published 1851). On taking up the agricultural management of the valley, post the changing of his brothers into black stones, Gluck puts into action a socially supportive programme. This model embodied Ruskin's ideas of a social welfare system which eventually came into actuality a century later in the Welfare State—which proves that fairy tales can 'come true.'

The ending of the novel with Diamond's death, however, seems to deviate from the traditional notion that fairy tales always end happily, with the young innocent protagonist triumphing and receiving great reward in this life. Through Diamond's dying MacDonald maintains the integrity of his text. He refuses to perform a magical saving and return to robust health for the child. Instead, Diamond's death reflects the probability of child mortality conducive with the period, an experience which sadly MacDonald could attest to in his own life. By Diamond's pre-pubescent death, his innocence is preserved. There is also an implied critique of Victorian society in this sad ending, suggesting that such wealth and concentration of innocence in itself, symbolised by Diamond, has no place in the real world. Charles Kingsley transformed his chimney sweep's boy Tom into a Great Man of Science, the reader knows not how because Tom was blindfolded going 'up the back stairs.' Tom's future is predictable in this practical mode since the nineteenth century was a great time for scientific discovery, engineering and industrialisation. He is not, however,

allowed to marry Ellie, merely be friends, since she is of a higher class, despite his rise in status. Kingsley's recognition of the horizon of expectation stops with class; MacDonald's with morality and humanity which can totally override class barriers, eradicating poverty, ignorance and the depravities of life. MacDonald has given some hope in demonstrating that this is to some extent as possible, but complete social change was in the future, and still is, for the divide between rich and poor continues to exist in the twenty first century in the United Kingdom, despite the Welfare State. Where MacDonald gives the reader the possibility of vision is in the final line of the text: 'They thought he was dead. I knew that he had gone to the back of the north wind.' (*NW* 292) The country of the imagination is where Diamond now lives, in a state which can be no other than bliss. What the adult narrator and the reader have is this experience translated into reality by Diamond and potentially to be continued in the ways in which individuals can transpose such through their own imaginative processes. As the omniscient narrator affirms, the back of the North Wind does exist, and certainly is not nonsense.

## Notes

[1] Frederick Engels *The condition of the working class in England : from personal observation and authentic sources*. First published in Great Britain in 1892, Granada, 1969

[2] See for example Jean Webb 'Alice as Subject in the Logic of Wonderland.' Cogan Thacker, Deborah and Webb, Jean (2002) *Introducing Children's Literature: Romanticism to Postmodernism*, London, Routledge.

[3] Thanks to Dr. Catherine Neale, Worcester University for this translation.

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# ‘A Sort of a Fairy Tale’: Narrative and Genre in George MacDonald’s *Little Daylight*

Rachel E. Johnson

George MacDonald’s tale *Little Daylight* first appeared as Chapter 28 of his longer story *At the Back of the North Wind* (1870). It has subsequently been reprinted in other collections of fairy tales and has more recently been retold in a picture book in which the narrative is equally in the verbal and written text.[1]

I will begin this article with an introduction to place it within the wider context of *ABNW* before examining the structure, motifs and characterisation within the tale *Little Daylight* with references to episodes within *ABNW*. In the final section I will draw together analysis and comment made in order to identify genres represented in the tale.

**Placement within *At the Back of the North Wind***

The scene for *Little Daylight* is set at the close of chapter 27 of *At the Back of the North Wind* where the author as narrator takes over from the internal narrator, Mr. Raymond, and provides a brief gloss on Mr. Raymond’s story told to children in the Children’s Hospital. I will assume some reader familiarity with *ABNW* and the main human character Diamond. Nanny, a crossing sweeper and a friend of Diamond is recovering from her illness. Diamond had enlisted the help of Mr. Raymond in order to get her into the hospital, thereby saving her life.

In two sentences towards the end of chapter 27, MacDonald sums up part of his essay on fairy tale from *A Dish of Orts* when he writes

> “I don’t quite know how much there was in it (i.e. the tale *Little Daylight*) to be understood, for in such a story everyone has just to take what he can get” (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind).

Adrian Gunther (Gunther) points out that the above comment, followed by the observation

> “they (i.e. the children) all listened with apparent satisfaction, and certainly with great attention” (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 257)

indicates that the story’s impact will be on the subconscious and on the imagination rather than on the intellect, like the poem Diamond’s mother read to him in chapter 13 of ABNW when they were on the beach and Diamond himself was recovering from illness. The rhymes he subsequently made to soothe his baby brother operate on this imaginative and subconscious rather than intellectual level, though these rhymes are concerned with rhythm in a musical sense rather than in a verbal sense. Both of these narratorial comments apply to the wider context of *Little Daylight*, that is to *ABNW*, as well as to the tale itself. In his introduction to the tale, the external narrator steps outside of the text as he makes the intertextual comment drawing the reader’s attention to the inspiration of *“The Sleeping Beauty”* as a possible source for the central idea of Mr. Raymond’s story. By referring to *“The Sleeping Beauty”* the external narrator indicates the genre ‘fairy tale’ to the listener, creating an expectation that what s/he is about to hear will follow the traditional fairy tale narrative pattern. The external narrator also infers the expectation of change in oral storytelling when he writes

> "for a good storyteller tries to make his stories better every time he tells them" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 257).

He embeds the idea of the genre 'fairy tale' in the mind of the listener/reader, despite the earlier comment by Mr. Raymond that he will tell "a sort of a fairy one" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 250) in response to the request for a fairy tale, which, incidentally, came from a little boy. The request for a true story came from a little girl. These responses in themselves indicate an inversion of the expected gender stereotypical preference in answer to the question "What sort of story shall it be?" Mr. Raymond's reply "I suppose, as there is a difference, I may choose" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind) implies an acceptance of the difference between a true story and a fairy tale, though the phrase 'as there is a difference' plants a doubt as to whether that difference might not be as clear or as obvious as the requester assumed. The reader/listener expectation from any genre is culturally learned and therefore it is more difficult for her to categorise a narrative when the expected generic pattern is subverted.

**Summary of the tale *Little Daylight***

The Princess Daylight is born to a king and queen who live in a palace with a wood on one side of it. Seven good fairies and one wicked fairy attend her christening. When the fairies confer their gifts, two out of the seven good fairies are 'kept in reserve' until after the wicked fairy had done her bit, in order to "undo as much as they might" ( 282).

The wicked fairy's curse was that the Little Daylight shall sleep all day and her physical and emotional state shall wax and wane with the moon. The best that the two remaining good fairies could do to mitigate the curse was to enable her to wake all night and provide a condition to the curse, that it should only last "until a prince comes who shall kiss her without knowing it" ( 282).

The royal household adjusted its routine accordingly. The Princess Daylight sought solitude in the wood where she grew ever more beautiful as the moon waxed and as the moon waned so did her beauty.

A prince, dressed as a peasant and fleeing insurrection in his own kingdom, finds himself at the cottage of one of the good fairies. Lost in the wood at night, he discovers Daylight dancing in an open glade. With a little help from the good fairy, and from the wicked fairy, though she thought she was hindering their meeting, the prince finds Daylight again when the moon is at its weakest. She appears old and ill. The prince kisses her out of compassion for her desperate condition as he tries to ease her suffering, thinking she is about to die. He does not of course know who she is.

The story ends as dawn breaks over the wood and Daylight watches the sun rise for the first time. The spell is broken.

**The Wood**

Having raised the listeners' expectation of a fairy tale, the narrator begins the story by setting the scene.

> "On one side of every palace there must be a wood" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 278).

The first sentence provides two expected fairy tale motifs, the palace and the wood, the one "open to the sun and wind," the other "growing wilder and wilder, until some wild beasts did what they liked in it" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 278).

The opposition between palace and wood is the first in a series of oppositions which are interwoven throughout the story. These oppositions are indicative of Roland Barthes symbolic code in which he states that oppositions mark out the province of antithesis. In Barthes statement that meaning can be articulated by representing its difference, the plight of Daylight as cursed never to see the sun is delineated against the description of her appearance, which is always described in terms of sunshine, blue sky and summer, in which the daylight hours are longer.

In Northrop Frye's discussion of fictional mode he states that the typical setting for romance is a forest. Though Daylight's wood is consistently referred to as a 'wood,' the description of its extent and inhabitants satisfy the requirements of a forest, such as wildness, the unknown (fairies), wild beasts and ultimately, the unexplored, "nobody had ever yet got to the end of it" (MacDonald, 1992 #366, 278).

Whilst it is clearly stated that this narrative is a fairy tale, Frye's explanation of the combining of fictional forms, one meaning of which can refer to genres, has been demonstrated at the beginning of a narrative viewed as a fairy tale by both editors and critics,[2] though the author paved the way for this flexibility by referring to the story as "a sort of a fairy one" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 258). In the mixing of genre, the tale reflects in a minor way the major combination of fantasy and realism in *ABNW* of which it is a part.

The reference to Barthes symbolic code in connection with binary opposition invites a symbolic meaning for the wood, which, described as "trim and nice" near the palace and getting progressively wilder and uncomprehended the further from civilization it stretches is interpreted by Gunther as representing the subconscious mind which Daylight explores more deeply as she grows older and as her physical and emotional conditions change.

At the beginning of the tale, the attention given to the wood indicates its prominence as the scene of action. As a fairy tale motif, the wood or forest is an essential part of the background. The emphasis given to it in the opening paragraph of the tale reinforces the self-conscious inclusion of the expected motifs of a fairy tale.

**Daylight "made her appearance"** ( 279)

The birth of Little Daylight is announced against a background of a description of the elements

> "when the wind and the sun were out together"
>
> ". . . she made her appearance from somewhere" (MacDonald, 1992 #366, 279).

The statement that "she made her appearance from somewhere" equates her looks and character with the sun and the wind and establishes the basis for her elemental, mysterious presence in the wood later in the story. The "bright eyes" and "lively ways" associated with her name, Daylight, and implying daylight as her natural element provide the second opposition, that of day and night or light and darkness. The contrast between her looks and her enforced place of waking existence prepares the listener for the same startling discrepancy as she dances in the moonlight at night and, in her weakened state at the waning of the moon, when her hair remained "the sunniest" and her eyes a "heavenly blue, brilliant . . . as the sky of a June day" giving her an "unnatural appearance" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 284/5).

**The Fairies**

The fairies are introduced through their connection with the wood and as part of the natural world, linking them to Daylight's elemental character. They live in trees "one, a hollow oak; another, a birch tree . . . " ( 279). By characterising them as elementally connected to their environment the narrator has deviated from the fairy tale convention in two ways. The first is by placing them in the history of the country

> "fairies live so much longer than we, that they can have business with a good many generations of human mortals" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 279)

and the second is by drawing into the story the image of the dryad from Greek mythology. The inclusion of a mythical element is another example of the "the co-existence between several generic modes" (Jameson). The image of the dryad is usually associated with youth, so the depiction of them as ageless not only links them to the youthfulness of Daylight, but with the ageless wise woman of, for example MacDonald's tales *The Golden Key, The Wise Woman, The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie.* It also sets up the third opposition, that of youth and age, in preparation for the contrast between Daylight's condition and appearance at the waxing and waning of the moon.

> "The more beautiful she was in the full moon, the more withered and worn did she become as the moon waned . . . she looked, . . . . Like an old woman exhausted with suffering" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind).

The wicked fairy is only referred to in terms of age and is defined by mud and swamp, parts of the natural world associated in the Victorian mind with ill-health and disease.[3] The remote, unexplored place where she lived and the description of mud and swamp also equates with those parts of the British Empire associated with disease, ignorance and spiritual darkness.

**The Christening**

The occasion of the christening, the invitations and who is forgotten are described in a similar way to the same event in MacDonald's *Light Princess* (1867). The fairy tale convention of the christening and giving of gifts by fairies is foregrounded by the narrator's commentary on narrative expectation when he says

> "In all history we find that fairies give their remarkable gifts to prince or princess, . . . , always at the christening" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind, 260)

followed by the fourth opposition, that of goodness and wickedness as he continues

> "wicked fairies choose the same time to do unkind things" (260).

The narrator's commentary continues as he introduces a brief theology of suffering into the tale.

> "But I never knew of any interference on the part of a wicked fairy that did not turn out a good thing in the end" (260).

He immediately lightens the allusion by giving *Sleeping Beauty*, from which *Little Daylight* is stated to be derived, as a proven example of such interference and its benefit, that is, that Sleeping Beauty was spared the "plague of young men" and woke up "when the right prince kissed her" (260).

The narrator concludes

> "For my part I cannot help wishing a good many girls would sleep until just the same fate overtook them. It would be happier for them, and more agreeable for their friends" (260).

This of course is debatable, not only in terms of the maturation process, male dominance and female independence, but also if the original Grimm's version of Sleeping Beauty is considered as the point of departure, but that is another discussion.

In the context of *Little Daylight*, the brief interpellation of theology echoes an earlier, fuller discussion in chapters six and seven of *ABNW* as North Wind takes Diamond out in a storm. Her task is to sink a ship. After several pages of discussion between Diamond and North Wind as Diamond attempts to reconcile his firm belief in the goodness of North Wind with her mission to sink a ship with people on board. North Wind herself tries to explain how she hears "the sound of a far off song .. it tells me that all is right; that it is coming to swallow up all cries" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind). In the last chapter of *Phantastes*, MacDonald's first adult fantasy published in 1858, he writes "What we call evil, is only the best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good" (MacDonald, Phantastes). A biblical example of this line of thought can be found in Genesis 45:5, the story of Joseph.

Commentaries on MacDonald's theology[4] discuss his theology of suffering in depth but in the present context of fairy tale it is an unexpected departure from generic convention.

The spell placed upon Daylight, despite the best efforts of the two good fairies 'kept in reserve,' meant that she would not know what daylight was, would fall asleep as soon as the sun appeared and, though awake at night, would wax and wane with the moon. The rearrangement of the household to accommodate this pattern is glossed over, except for the effect of the waning moon on the princess.

> "She was wan and withered like the poorest, sickliest child you might come upon in the streets of a great city in the arms of a homeless mother" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind).

This is the condition of Nanny when Diamond found her ill and before she was brought to the children's hospital. The wider context of the fairy tale is thus foregrounded against the immediate realism of Diamond's London as presented in *ABNW*.

"**And thus things went on until she was nearly seventeen years of age"** (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind).

Seventeen was the age at which the Light Princess discovered water just as Daylight discovered the element 'moonlight.' The Light Princess swam in the lake, Daylight dance in the moonlight. In this way, both gained independence and freedom. Gunther writes

> "the active agent in his (MacDonald's) fairy tales is almost always female" (Gunther).

She contrasts Daylight with the passive heroine of traditional tales, particularly Sleeping Beauty. Her view ignores both the high proportion of traditional fairy tale heroines who are the propelling force of the tale and the unavoidable fact that Daylight still has to await her prince before she can be freed from the spell which binds her to an unbalanced life in which the sun does not feature. She can only experience the reflection of the source of light and enjoy the moon.

**Enter the Prince**

It is as Daylight is reaching "the zenith of her loveliness" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind 293) as the moon was "nearer the full" that the prince discovers her. One paragraph explains how the prince came to be deep in the wood. This paragraph reads like a potted version of a boys adventure story and includes political rebellion, violence, flight, disguise and hardship of the kind that toughens the prince and brings out the essential 'decency' and thoughtfulness of his character. The only unexpected trait is his passivity. His action is portrayed in terms of lack of choice. He was "compelled to flee for his life" (286). He did not abandon his peasant disguise because "he had no other clothes to put on and . . . very little money" (286). He told no-one he was a prince

> "For he felt a prince ought to be able to get on like other people" (287)

and he had set out on his quest through necessity. MacDonald continues to parody the fairy tale narrative when he says of the prince

> "He had read of princes setting out upon adventure; and here he was in similar case, only without having had a choice in the matter" (287).

The prince is following a passive destiny, but that destiny is still that of the fairy tale figure the youngest or only son, and the outcome will depend upon an act of spontaneous compassion.

From the point of the prince's appearance, the expected fairy tale motifs gather around him. Though he does not realise it, he receives supernatural help from the good fairy and from her gifts, which he has with him just when they are needed. These gifts are the

tinder box and a small bottle of cordial, both gifts that resonate with former fairy tale appearances. The hospitality of the good fairy reinforces her parallels with the wise women already cited from MacDonald's tales. The food she gives him and the rest he has in her cottage have an extra-ordinary restorative effect, just as the food and rest offered by the wise woman in *The Wise Woman, The Golden Key* and *The Princess and the Goblin* restores Rosamund, Tangle and Irene.

At the point when the prince first sees her, Daylight is living in her own house deep in the wood. As she grew older, she had retreated further into the darker, wilder parts of the wood until she settled at the edge of an open glade

> "for here the full moon shone free and glorious" (266).

The prince had "wandered and wandered, and got nowhere" (268) before he reached this open glade. 'Somewhere' is defined in the prince's terms as anywhere not in the wood, so anywhere still in the wood he felt to be nowhere. The paradox is that he reached the only place where he needed to be to fulfil his destiny. In her retreat into the wood, Daylight, still described in terms of the sun and the summer sky, was, in the process of maturation, taming the unknown, taking her daylight character into the dark unexplored recesses of the wood, even while she waned with the moon. When the prince first observed her dancing and singing in the glade, she appeared to him as "some strange being of the wood" (269), an elemental creature rather than a human.

Daylight's dance graphically illustrates Nikolajeva's concept of children's fiction as "a symbolic depiction of a maturation process" (Nikolajeva) in its cyclical motion and its continual movement from the circular to the linear as Daylight progresses towards he completion of her character as she approaches adulthood. She is of course unaware of this significance. Her dance is inspired by the fullness of the moon and "the exuberance of her delight" (274). Fairy tale, romance and myth, the three genres that 'co-exist,' to use Jameson's term, in this story, all exist in mythical time, emphasising the importance of the cycles of nature. In this story the cyclical nature of the phases of the moon are, at the point of the prince's entry, intersected by the linearity of his story up to the point of his meeting with Daylight. At this point of intersection he breaks into and joins her to complete the transformation of both their realities which is characteristic of both romance and fairy tale.

**"The very thing she was trying to prevent"** (278)

When the bad fairy realised the prince had "seen Daylight,"

> "she contrived by her deceitful spells, that the next night the prince could not by any endeavour find his way to the glade" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind).

But; and here the narrator breaks into the story to reinforce the theological commentary he had inserted earlier,

> "But it is all of no consequence, for what they (the wicked fairies) do never succeeds; nay, in the end it brings about the very thing they are trying to prevent . . . from the beginning of the world they have really helped instead of thwarting the good fairies" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind).

The princess, "dancing like an embodied sunbeam," had already taken control of what might have been a relationship

> "for, however much she might desire to be set free, she was dreadfully afraid of the wrong prince" (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind).

By preventing the prince from finding Daylight again until she was in her 'waned' condition, the wicked fairy ruled out any possibility of the spell being broken because she had ruled out compassion, not having any herself. As Maria Tatar writes, in fairy tales "compassion counts" (Tatar) and, true to the compassionate act performed by the youngest or only son in traditional fairy tales, the prince kisses the princess when she appears old and ill, purely out of compassion and without knowing that in doing this act, he is fulfilling his destiny and freeing Daylight from the spell.

The seven days and nights when the prince is wandering in the wood equates within the fairy tale narrative structure with the struggle or test, which continues until his treatment of the supposedly old and sick woman is clear. Searching for the princess, whom he has only seen "at the zenith of her loveliness," his behaviour toward the person he finds at the foot of a great birch tree is entirely disinterested. It is at this point that the two gifts from the good fairy are needed; the tinderbox to light a fire and the cordial which revived the princess sufficiently for her to open her eyes and look at the prince. It is worth noting that this is the second time the princess has been found at the foot of a birch tree. One of the good fairies lived in a birch tree and may have been aiding the princess more than she realised.

The prince's compassionate kiss completes the fairy tale cycle of quest, test, success, by freeing the princess. The final expectation in a fairy tale narrative is that of success, or homecoming, which in this case

does not happen. As with so may of MacDonald's stories, there is no conclusive ending. Cohan and Shires point out that the opening and closing of a story mark events paradigmatically (Cohan), that is, the initial event is replaced or transformed by the closing event. Though *Little Daylight* follows this pattern, it departs from the expected 'happy ever after' ending and finishes with the prince and princess still in the wood facing "the first gleam of morning" (281). As Gunther states,

> "the ending is the beginning, a new stage in the process, a new birth" (Gunther).

This takes us back into the host story, *ABNW*, which ends with what appears to be the death of Diamond. The narrator, Mr. Raymond, articulates one of MacDonald's key ideas when he says

> "they thought he was dead. I knew he had gone to the back of the North Wind." (MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind)

Indicating that the dimension at the back of the north wind was more real, and reaching it was a movement into more life.

**Conclusion**

In this brief examination of the tale I have demonstrated how the fairy tale pattern of journey, test, success, interwoven with the romance pattern of destiny, providence, ethical opposition and transformation, encompasses the progress of the prince and Daylight within and without their expected fairy tale roles. The "reliance on antecedents for parodic effects" (Knoepflmacher) is so overt as to prepare the listener for the subversion of narrative and character and the oppositions found in setting, character, characteristics, time, and ethics.

The children in the hospital "were delighted" (282) with the story. Ending with the expectation that daily life in the world of the palace with its consequent responsibilities and practicalities would resume, Diamond and Mr. Raymond are lead back into the practicalities of their responsibility for the recovering Nanny.

The tale *Little Daylight* is a turning point in *ABNW* as the lives of Diamond's family, Nanny and Mr. Raymond, hitherto touching only occasionally, become inextricably linked. Romance and fairy tale leak into the realistic aspects of *ABNW*, transforming "ordinary reality" (Jameson).

**Notes**

[1] Anthea and Duntze Bell, Dorothee (illustrator), ed., Little Daylight by George MacDonald (London: North South Books, 1987).

[2] See for example Sadler's *Gifts of the Child Christ* and Gunther's article referenced in the bibliography.

[3] See information on damp, sanitation and swamp miasmas in A.N. Wilson, The Victorians (London: Arrow Books, 2003).

[4] For example Hein, Raeper, Phillips.

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# What Does the Tabard Inn Have to Do with St. Paul's?
# F.D. Maurice on Literature

Craig McDonald

Late in the 1850's George MacDonald wrote to his father that he had delivered for publication "a little MSS. that took me two months to write without any close work—a sort of fairy tale for grown people" (MacDonald 290). With these words he records the quiet and, it would seem, almost painless birth of *Phantastes*, that "sort of fairy tale" which would, nearly sixty years later, "convert" and "rebaptise" the imagination of C.S. Lewis (Lewis, "Introduction" 11). The literal importance of this event cannot be overestimated by those of us who, like Lewis, owe so much to MacDonald. There is, however, a figurative significance as well. Also mentioned in that letter is the name of the Rev. F. D. Maurice.[1] Maurice had, in fact, been the person responsible for helping MacDonald to find a publisher, one kindness in a whole series that he showed to a friend wounded by the church and plagued by poverty.[2] In a sense, then, Maurice served as the midwife to the book.

Maurice's role betrays a magnanimity characteristic of his life, his theology, and, as to our purposes today, his study of literature. So broad, in fact, were the latter that in 1840 he was appointed to teach English literature and modern history, as well as theology, at King's College, London.[3] His inaugural address is nothing less than a comprehensive survey of major literary figures and periods, and it offers us a vivid portrait of his intellect and heart. We can get an accurate taste of the whole by a brief look at his description of Chaucer, a poet, he states, with the "tendency to coarseness accompanying very great delicacy of perception and feeling" and with the "propensity to dwell on a source of the lowest and vulgarest exhibitions of human life united to a lively sympathy with manly virtue and feminine grace" ("IL" 284). But Maurice does not leave his assessment there. He would search out Chaucer's motives:

> This is precisely what you would expect from a poet who had lost some of this reverence for that which time and authority had canonized; who had acquired a new and deep reverence for the worth and dignity of men; who shared in the earth-born feelings which belonged to those who were beginning to find out that they had position in society, but who had these quickened and glorified by their connection with certain moral truths which gave to each man and citizen the sense of his having a distinct and personal connection with a divine and mysterious economy. ("IL" 284)

The same virtue, Maurice observes, is to be found in Shakespeare, "only accompanied with a much wider range of observation, and with a clearer sense of the system and harmony that are in the world" ("IL" 285).[4] And so the survey continues as the newly appointed professor turns his literary telescope on Milton, the 18th century, and the Romantics.[5]

In the final moments of his address, Maurice sets forth what he believes to be the great principle animating English literature: "man, as man, is glorious . . . only because there is a bond which connects him with the Divine nature" ("IL" 287). Such a principle, he adds,

> will carry us far in the belief that all the barriers which separate men, united in that acknowledgement, will be ultimately removed, and that then they will go forth to make all mankind partakers of the same fellowship . . . [J]ust in so far as literary men do endeavor to stretch their thoughts abroad, and to interest themselves for their fellowmen, as made in the image of God, literature will flourish and win new triumphs and . . . just so far as they shut themselves up in narrow circles, glorify themselves, flatter one another, and despise their brethren, literature will become a useless and cursed thing, hateful to men and to God.

We discover in the inaugural lecture not only the range and depth of Maurice's own reading and thus the aptness of his appointment, but also two related features of the Christian faith that permeate his thought and action: the incarnation of spiritual truth in ordinary life and relationship. It was fitting, then, that Maurice was midwife to *Phantastes*. He was to spend his whole life arguing that ideas must be "incarnated."[6] Although Maurice's thought has broad social implications, which

he began to work out through his involvement in the Christian Socialist movement and which he thoroughly explored in a work entitled *Social Morality*, let us, for purposes of illustrating the point in this limited space, examine the effects of incarnation on a single relationship, that between the divine and the human.

Maurice's views on incarnation, though orthodox, sound radical to these modern ears because of the intensity with which he explored them in his writing and practiced them in his own life.[7] Incarnation, he argues, shapes all human activity and would break down the artificial distinctions between the spiritual and the physical: "May not *all* sensible things, by a *necessity* of their nature, be testifying to us of that which is nearest to us, of that which it most concerns us to know, of the mysteries of our own life, and of God's relation to us?" (*WR* 94-5; my italics). It was for this reason that Christ's ministry took on such a palpable form, so that even his parables were drawn from ordinary life as his means of teaching. "It is in little things, in particulars that the laws of a universe reveal themselves" (*WR* 60). Drawing heavily, by his own admission, on Bishop Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, Maurice concludes: "It would be seen that the analogy between the human and the divine is not an imaginary or artificial one, but exists in the nature of things" (*WR* 99-100). Far from shying away from physical fact, the Christian faith embraces it, even in the deepest of theological truths. The ascension is a case in point. In words reminiscent of those used by J.R.R. Tolkien to convince C.S. Lewis of the truth of Christianity, Maurice urges his reader to consider the ascension "not as a legend, but as the fulfillment of all legends; not as an idea, but as the substantiation of an idea in a fact" (*TE* 280).[8]

The Gospels confront us over and over with the physicality of Christ's own redemptive act: his was a body "raised" from the grave; "glorified" when it ascended; "redeemed" from corruption. Redemption is not reserved simply for the soul ("that which thinks and judges"), but also for the body, with all its senses. It is not simply a "moral and intellectual redemption" (*KC* 1.309-10).[9]

The world understood thus validates science and art as fields of human activity because they would inquire into the handiwork of the living God. True, they assume their greatest validity only as they serve a higher purpose, which Maurice affirms in this passage from the *Kingdom of Christ*:

> Surely every fragment of information respecting the past or present condition of mankind,—every gleam of light which language can afford us into our inward form and structure, should be accounted most precious; but still for an end. To bring forth the man, to guide him into that universal truth, by knowing which, and only by knowing which, he is made free,—this is the end. (*KC* 2.68)[10]

That "but," however, does not condone the haphazard inquiry of science or the careless practice of art, as if they were of only minor importance. A later passage from the same work underscores the intensity with which such activity should be undertaken:

> [E]very power of mind and body, every art and mystery among men is a solemn and sacred trust of which the owner of that power, the possessor of that art cannot acquit himself till he has taken the one to its utmost, till he has compelled the other to yield all the blessings which are contained in it. The Church draws no nice distinctions, lays down no embarrassing rules. Everything is good which is true, everything is evil which is false. (*KC* 3.312-3)

"Taken to its utmost." "Compelled to yield." These are the words of a man for whom "manly" (his word) intellectual encounter was daily bread and who could attend lectures by T. H. Huxley and read Charles Darwin with interest and without fear for his faith.

This attitude that characterizes all human endeavor might be specifically applied to the acts of reading and writing. As a theologian, Maurice expresses particular concern for how one reads the Bible. The questions vital to this task are these: how can our age experience Christ for itself? how is he more than a dim memory, which itself is preserved through persons long dead? (*ESJ* 47-48). If we see the text as simply a "set of letters," Christ will of necessity become more and more distantly removed from us with each passing generation. The text itself will be an insufficient guide to spiritual truth and experience. Such is true even for readers who view the Bible as the Word of God if by that expression they would substitute the doctrines of Christ for the living experience with Christ (*ESJ* 39). In either case, the Bible is little more than an artifact.

To rescue the text from this status is not, as the German higher critics supposed, to quest for the "historical" Jesus, but to realize that words themselves have a life and power of their own. They testify to the living presence of the author, and they invite us into his mind and experience (*ESJ* 52). The Bible, then, is but the entrance into experience. It requires more than passive receptivity, more, even, than intellectual engagement. It requires response. We achieve morality, for example, not by reading a book or learning maxims, but by living life (*ESJ* 39).

The conclusions Maurice draws about reading the Bible apply fundamentally to reading other texts, as Stephen Prickett notes: "what begins as a theory of biblical interpretation, centering on the irruption of the divine into human history . . . ripples out into all secular

literature, providing a theory of creativity that refuses to place any boundary between the sacred and the secular."[11] As if to illustrate, in his own work, the seamlessness between these two worlds (or to remove the distinction altogether), Maurice dedicates the third edition of his *Theological Essays* to the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, declaring that true theology must "correspond to the deepest thoughts and feelings of human beings . . . . Your writings have taught me to enter into many of those thoughts and feelings."

Even in his twenties, Maurice was setting forth this principle of reading, first as editor of the *Metropolitan Quarterly Magazine* while he was at Cambridge and then, appropriately enough, in his own (and only) work of fiction, the novel *Eustace Conway*. As editor of the *Metropolitan Quarterly*, he denounced the project of the academy to establish a formal distance between books, which it claimed to illuminate, and their readers. He took particular aim at *Blackwood's Magazine* for its "love of criticism" (*Life* 1.62). As a novelist himself, he creates the character of Reverend Wilmot, who confides to Eustace Conway, the youthful, but already jaded protagonist, that he read poetry, not as an "amusement" nor to "indulge a habit of criticism," but as "a record of those human feelings in which I had been or wished to be, a sharer" (*EC* 3.79). Even as a proponent of English literature as a separate academic discipline, Maurice could foresee the power of the critic's scalpel to maim its object, and he used his position as editor of the short-lived *Education Magazine* to stem the tide of the vivisectionists.

As we have seen in Maurice's way of "reading" creation and reading the Bible, the claims a book might make on its own behalf are at once exalted and humble. Exalted because it establishes a living relationship between author and reader; humble because it can never be the substitute for that relationship. The value of literature is its helpfulness as a servant, not its power as a master. When literature would attempt to usurp its true master, its limitations are revealed and certain dangers arise.

The first, a danger, is to confuse the aesthetic and the religious experience. Rev. Wilmot clearly distinguishes between the two and concludes that art can never adequately substitute for faith (*EC* 3.40).[12] This both affirms and rejects Wordsworth's belief in the inspiration of non-Biblical writers. Given his attitude toward literature, as outlined above, Maurice agrees that Shakespeare and Homer, like Paul and Isaiah, are indeed divinely inspired. After all, they have the self-same Spirit, and all gifts come from that Spirit. But if we are led, with Wordsworth and, for that matter, so many other Romantics, to glorify "the intellect and genius at the expense of that which is common and universal," then we have misunderstood the character and purpose of inspiration (*Life* 2.401). Visions that seek no higher glory, Maurice allows, can certainly be "beautiful"; but cut off from their true source and celebrated as an end in themselves, they must forever remain "heartless" (*KC* 3.402-3). We are called to pursue a higher aim, to "use the objects of sense for the purpose of overcoming the fascination of the sense, and pursue intellectual studies, that we may not worship the intellect" (*KC* 2.213).

Maurice would also remind us of the limitations of human endeavor (particularly in language). Prickett expresses his thought well:

> [Language] is, by its nature, incomplete: possessing "method," but always denying the "systems" that would provide total explanation. Thus language is *never* wholly to be accounted for by language, but always points beyond itself. Sounding at this point remarkably like Derrida, Maurice has a vision of the creativity of language in terms of perpetual incompleteness, always allowing for more to be said.

Maurice would once again turn us back to the Incarnation. Christ, who comes as the fulfillment of all toward which human endeavor aspires, gives us means to become citizens of the kingdom we have longed for: "he has taught us that we are spiritual beings, and that all sensible forms and images may illustrate the mysteries of this kingdom, but can never be substituted for them, or made a part of them" (*KC* 3.404). Reading and even the ideas to which reading introduces us are but the porters at the gate of this kingdom, never the potentates on the throne.

Finally, Maurice points to yet another danger, the insipidness of much contemporary religious literature, which has given over the struggle to be "truer than other literature, to speak out deeper thoughts, more earnestly to enter into the life of things" (*KC* 3.311). His judgment is scathing:

> it is altogether an empty, heartless, outside representation of things, sugared over with Christian phrase and conclusions. Everything leaves the impression upon your mind that the object is to supply a set of exceeding morbid appetites with a most mawkish kind of pleasure, and to produce a barren and mischievous self-contentment, with which earnestness and reflection can never dwell. (*KC* 3.311)

The world of so-called Christian literature could well stand to hear such a prophetic voice today.

We might sum up this brief inquiry by posing to Maurice two questions: What is true literature? and What is an appropriate response to the author of such literature? In the *Kingdom of Christ*, he answers both succinctly. To the first, he responds, true literature is that which has "enabled us to know ourselves better

than we did before." To the author of such literature, he would accord not some "shabby, heartless, newspaper praise, that he is a man of power, or talent, or genius." No, he would embrace such a person "as a benefactor and a friend" (*KC* 3.282).[13] Little wonder, then, that George MacDonald, who came within the compass of Maurice's embrace, responded with such deep respect, gratitude, and affection in return. Little wonder, too, that he shared this vision of literature that could give him room to stretch his ample limbs, a vision whereby his own passionate love for Christ might be not simply recorded, but incarnated in the lives of future generations.

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## Notes

[1] Greville MacDonald, in his book on the life of his father, devotes an entire chapter to the relationship between his father and Maurice (397-406).

[2] This was not an isolated incident. The character of Maurice is movingly illustrated in the story of the five Cambridge men who agreed amongst themselves to write down, independently, the name of the one person they would wish to have by their side during their final hours. Although none of them had any special ties to Maurice, it was his name written on all five papers (Vidler 226-7).

[3] 13 October 1840. The address is recorded in the *Educational Magazine*, for which Maurice served as editor. The critic Terry Eagleton notes the contribution Maurice, among others, made on the establishment of English literature as a university discipline and characterizes the new enterprise thus:

> English was literally the poor man's Classics—a way of providing a cheapish "liberal" education for those beyond the charmed circles of public school and Oxbridge. From the outset, in the work of "English" pioneers like F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley, the emphasis was on solidarity between the social classes and the cultivation of "larger sympathies," the instillation of national pride and the transmission of "moral" values. (23)

[4] Maurice's social concerns are interwoven throughout his enormous body of work. The inaugural address is no exception. To the reader of Shakespeare, he writes:

> Who can help connecting Caliban—his half dawnings of affection—his brutal instincts—his sense of his own dignity—his idolatry of Stephano and his bottle, with those pictures of savage life which were pouring in, in Shakespeare's time upon the ears of Europeans, or with all the melancholy records of the way in which European civilization and Christianity have made themselves known to savages that have accumulated since?

[5] He lists these principles of the Romantics: "that the most deep and awful things are not those which are most strange and peculiar; that there are a wonder and mystery in common and daily occurrences; that poetry should dwell more in cottages than in palaces; that the hearts of men are more worthy of note than the deeds of heroes" ("IL" 286-7).

[6] In this regard, I would argue that Maurice's contribution to literary study is not so much a revolution as a radical application of those two principles to its theory and practice. But see Prickett, whose assessment is that Maurice's ideas are advanced for their time and even anticipate some of the notions of Jacques Derrida.

[7] Although not radical enough for some. Rupert Shortt notes that Archbishop Rowan Williams, in developing a "redemptivist" theory of Christian socialism, believes Maurice's incarnational approach to be "hopelessly compromised" because it does not challenge the prevailing culture forcibly enough (111).

[8] Lewis, in an oft-quoted letter to his friend Arthur Greeves, records the conclusions he drew from the evening:

> Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths; i.e. the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call "real things" . . . namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. (18 October 1931, *They Stand Together* 427)

[9] Wondra summarizes Maurice's thinking on this idea: the Kingdom of God "begins within" to be "manifest without": it is to "penetrate the feelings, habits, thoughts, words, acts, of him who is the subject of it. At last it is to penetrate our whole social existence" (xvi).

[10] Maurice comments on his own experience of art: "I have learnt from pictures, and am willing to learn from them. I believe I might learn much from this one of Michael Angelo's which would do me great good, which would give strength, distinctness, even depth, to my own convictions, and to the words of inspiration" (*TE* 174).

[11] Prickett adds: "It is not hard to see how such a view would appeal to someone like the deracinated Congregational minister, George MacDonald, whose slow return to Christian orthodoxy was signalled by his growing friendship with Maurice."

[12] Wilmot states that if religion means devotion, then both poetry and religion are similar; but, he argues, "when devotion has respect to a real object,—the Creator of our minds, and not their creature; in other words, when it presumes religion,—it will have no natural connexion with poetry."

[13] Maurice expounds on this notion in his essay "The Friendship of Books" in the book by that title.

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**Dorothy Sayers and the Responsibilities of the Christian Writer**

Christine M. Fletcher

## Introduction

Writing on friendship in *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis said:

> in most societies at most periods Friendships will be between men and men or women and women. . . . [the sexes] will seldom have had with each other the companionship in common activities which is the matrix of Friendship. . . . Hence in a profession (like my own) where men and women work side by side, or in the mission field, or among authors and artists, such Friendship is common.
>
> (2000, p 86-88)

Lewis and Sayers shared a background of academic study at Oxford, of being known as popular writers with a large following, and of being public Christians—writing about and defending Christianity. Lewis wrote to Charles Moorman 'To be sure, we had a common point of view, but we had it before we met. It was the cause rather than the result of our friendship.' (Lewis, W., 1966, p 287-288) Carpenter reported in his book *The Inklings*: 'She was the first person of importance who ever wrote me a fan-letter,' he [Lewis] recalled, and he added, 'I liked her, originally, because she liked me; later for the extraordinary zest and edge of her conversation—as I like high wind.' (1978, p 189)

Their friendship developed through letters; the first of these was a fan letter from Sayers to Lewis on the appearance of *The Screwtape Letters*[1]. Their letters are those of friends, written with humour and honesty, discussing each other's works or a common project such as the volume of essays to honour Charles Williams. In this instance, Lewis had misunderstood the Oxford University Press's attitude and wrote to Sayers, who replied with a typically forceful letter. When the Press clarified the misunderstanding, Lewis sent their letter to Sayers with a handwritten footnote, 'Best quality sackcloth and ashes in sealed packets delivered in plain vans at moderate charges' (qtd. in *Letters* Vol. *3*, p 155). Sayers replied, 'My menu for tonight shall be Humble Pie, IPSISSIMA VERBA with sharp sauce, FRUITS meet for Repentance' (*ibid.*).

They addressed each other quite formally until Sayers sent Lewis a Card with an allegorical drawing on the occasion of his move to Cambridge in 1954, eleven years after the first letter. He responded with a poem, beginning, 'Dear Dorothy, I'm puzzling hard/What underlies your cryptic card,' . . . and closing 'No matter, for I'm certain still/It comes to me with your good will; /Which with my prayer, I send you back/Madam, your humble servant, Jack.' (qtd. in *Letters* Vol. 4, p 196) Her own poem in reply is addressed to 'Dear Jack', as were her subsequent letters to him.

Sayers and Lewis took their responsibilities as Christians very seriously, by taking up the public defence of Christianity and dealing kindly and faithfully with the inquirers that their public work produced. Some of the best writing on Christianity from both of them is found in their letters, fortunately now more available to the reading public. Sayers was conscious of her own lack of spiritual experiences, and respected Lewis, despite his blind spot about women.[2] She recognized that he had what she had not, an experience of conversion, which becomes a powerful presence in his published works:

> Also, apart from all this, he has experienced a genuine religious conversion, which is more than most of us have, and is always a little frightening in its effects because of the way it alters values. (*Letters* Vol 4 p 264)

She was especially fond of the Narnia series:

> All the books have that tension; I think it probably comes from the writer's very strong sense of the reality of good and evil. *The Silver Chair* is a very good one, and so is *The Voyage of the Dawn-Treader*. And they all come out right in the end! Also, the girls, on the whole, are given as much courage as the boys, and more virtue (all the really naughty and tiresome children are boys); and they are even allowed to fight . . . (*Letters* Vol 4 p 271)

Lewis, in turn, appreciated her work, especially the play cycle *The Man Born to Be King* which he reread each Lent (Phillips 2003 p 218) and her translation of Dante. On 15 November 1949 he wrote to her about her translation of *The Inferno:*

> I've finished it now. There's no doubt, taking it in all, it's a stunning work. The real test is this, that however I set out with the idea of attending to your translation, before I've read a page I've forgotten all about you and am thinking only of Dante, and two pages later I've forgotten about Dante and am thinking about Hell. (qtd in *Letters* Vol. 3 p 465)

**What does the Christian writer do?**

Lewis and Sayers had written in popular newspapers and spoken on the BBC defending Christianity. A disagreement arose between them over the Christian writer's responsibility to defend the faith when Lewis wrote to Sayers in 1946, asking her to write a booklet on Sin for a series of small booklets for Sixth Formers—17 and 18 year olds. (Brabazon 1981 p 256) This was a very reasonable request. She had produced articles and speeches defending and explaining the Christian creeds from 1937 onwards in addition to her two major works in this period, *The Man Born to Be King*, twelve plays on the life of Christ broadcast by the BBC from 1941-1943 and *The Mind of the Maker*, published in 1941 a treatise on creative mind which explains her analogy for the Trinity in the process of human creation. However, she refused this request. She was occupied, as she had been since 1944 with Dante, and had just finished her play *The Just Vengeance* for The Coventry Cathedral Festival and was also organizing her speeches and articles into two volumes, *Unpopular Opinions* which appeared in 1946 and *Creed or Chaos?* which appeared in 1947.

It might be argued that she refused this because a book about Sin for young adults would have to deal with sexual morality, as Lust is one of the seven deadly sins, and that involves discussing gender. When Lewis wrote to her asking her to write opposing the ordination of women, she replied, first asking if he were sure that there was such a movement and that it was serious and mentioning her own uncertainty about the theological status of the doctrine, and discomfort with the Church's attitude to women:

> Unfortunately, the Church's whole attitude to women has always been so pagan and oriental as to be very thorny in the handling. The most I find I can do is to keep silence. (*Letters* Vol. 4, p 388)

Secondly, she knew herself as a sinner both in having had an illegitimate child and in marrying a divorced person. Given how often Somerset House featured in her own detective stories, she must have worried that someone might discover her secret, and so bring not only personal distress to her, but through her, public disgrace to the Church. When she did write about sexual morality, it was to place it in context: it was not the only sin nor was it the worst possible sin[3]. She could hardly expand on this reason to Lewis; and she could not have written a book at that time as honestly as she would have had to write to meet her own standards of integrity. If this discomfort with the topic because of her own life and dislike of the Church's attitude to women, she could have claimed that she was too busy. Instead she made it an issue of artistic integrity, that she was not called to do this task.

Lewis questioned her about her refusal. He wrote that if deciding to accept work was influenced by what other people say, then, 'your "Six Other Deadly Sins" is about as good as it could be. And if you wrote a book on sin for this series, it would certainly be a good one. Against it stands your artistic conscience. I wish I knew what place artistic consciences will hold a moment after death.' (qtd. in Brabazon, 1981 p 236).

He had touched on Sayers's core concern as a person, a writer and a Christian, integrity in work. First she rejected the distinction between conscience and artistic conscience, and stated her theological starting point:

> if you admit at all that gifts and talents have any sanctity in themselves (this is badly put—I mean, if you think God manifests Himself in the natural order *at all*—that a body is to be honoured for being a body, or a job for *being* a job, or an intellect for *being* an intellect) you have got to deal honestly with them and respect their proper truth. (*Letters* Vol. 3 p 252)

She admits that good workmanship can be an idol; but goes on to say, 'I don't somehow fancy showing up a lot of stuff to the Carpenter's Son and saying, 'Well, I admit that the wood was green and the joints untrue and the glue bad, but it was all church furniture' (*ibid.*). This was one of her hobby-horses, that pious intentions do not excuse bad workmanship.

She was not basing her decision on what to write on other people's opinions; she echoed T.S. Eliot, 'You must not do even the right deed for the wrong reason' (*op. cit.* p 253). She was not claiming that authors write with no thought of their audience, but drew a distinction between two approaches, one which she considered valid and the other false.

> 'You must not look at them from above [your ivory tower], or outside, and say: 'Poor creatures; they would obviously be the better for so-and-so—I must try and make up a dose for them'. You've got to come galloping out shouting excitedly: 'Look here! look what I've found! Come and have a bit of it—it's grand—you'll love it—I can't keep it to myself, and anyhow, I want to know what you think of it.' (*ibid.*)

She knew that she and Lewis were good enough craftsmen to produce a passable product, even if inspiration, as she had defined it, were lacking, but thought it would be dishonest to do that rather than simply say, 'I'm sorry, it isn't there.' (*ibid.*) Her point is not just a selfish defence of doing what one wants to do, but of resisting the temptation to pride: 'One must do what one is called to do; but one isn't really the pole of the universe, and the thing won't really fall to pieces because one drops out for a moment till the next call comes.' (*ibid*.)

She saw working without an interior truth to communicate as producing the *ersatz*, and she returns to her point about conscience:

> No, you can't divide the conscience into 'artistic' and the other sort. It's all one; and you can't serve God with lies; whether the lie is in the intention or in the workmanship is no odds—it will eat its way right through to the end. (*op. cit.*, p 254).

In his reply[4] to her letter, Lewis wrote:

> 'I don't think the difference between us comes where you think. Of course one mustn't do *dishonest* work. But you seem to take as the criterion of honest work the sensible desire to write, the 'itch'. That seems to me precious like making 'being in love' the only reason for going on with a marriage. In my experience the desire has no constant ration to the value of the work done. My own frequent uneasiness comes from another source—the fact that apologetic work is so dangerous to one's own faith. A doctrine never seems dimmer to me than when I have just successfully defended it. Anyway thanks for an intensely interesting letter.' (qtd. in Brabazon, 1981 p 236)

Brabazon, Sayers's official biographer, comments, 'to the simple but trenchant accusation that she seems to confuse what she ought to do with what she feels like doing, she appears to have no convincing reply'. (*op. cit.* p 236-237) A colleague of mine has suggested that Sayers's position was similar to that of a carpenter saying, 'Sorry, I don't feel called to making bookshelves today.' If being a writer is comparable to being a carpenter, and as both are crafts it is a fair analogy, Sayers's position about artistic integrity seems weak indeed. To discover how she justified her position, I turn to examining her reasoning,

First, I think that in the letter I quoted above, Sayers had displayed humility and a trust in the providence of God to provide a spokesman for His purposes. Neither she not any other writer was indispensable to the purposes of the Almighty. In her reply to this letter[5], she restated her conviction that the truth must be present to her 'imaginative intellect' before she can proclaim it.

She then went on to explain her general discomfort with writing apologetics: she hated seeming to 'lay claim to more "faith" and "spirituality" than I have. I have always been very careful to make my statements as factual and impersonal as possible:' (*Letters* Vol. 3 p 255) but she then complains that whenever she does write apologetics it is misreported. 'If I write "the Church affirms . . ." the next thing is a report: "Miss Sayers avows her personal belief in . . . "' (*ibid.*) She believed that in apologetic work, but not in creating fiction or plays, she can become a victim of her own propaganda: 'In a work of art I could not—all the insincerities would come screaming to the surface and destroy plot, characters and even language, because then I am writing in my own medium and will suffer no falsehood.' (*ibid.*)

To his charge that she is confusing the 'itch' to write with her Christian duty, she reminds him that with the exception of *The Mind of the Maker*, 'everything, almost, I have written has been a commissioned job.' To accept any job honestly, she must ask, if she has any truth 'asking to be communicated.' If not, then neither the money nor the audience nor anything else should influence her, or any other artist, to accept the job. (*op. cit.* p 256)

She observes a key difference between them in their perceptions of God:

> I think one of the causes of misunderstanding between us is that the only kind of love I understand at all is the kind that you put the lowest—the love of the artist for the artefact. . . . 'our Father' would only suggest to me the mildest of mild affections, whereas 'our Maker' really is a 'lord of terrible aspect'. Nobody needs to tell me why God should want to make a thing, or why He should want to

> make it with an independent will (that's what we'd all like to be able to do) or why He should be distressed when it went wrong, or wallop it savagely back into shape, or why the only means of getting in contact with it would be to make Himself part of His own fiction: I know all that from the inside, so to speak. (*op. cit.* p 257)

Lewis had written novels, he had experienced this process. This is one reason, I believe, she cared so deeply that he understood her viewpoint. In his reply to this letter he wrote, 'The only difference is that I see nothing but doubts where all looks self-evident to you. That may well be because you're a real writer and I'm only a half-timer.' (qtd in *Letters* Vol. 3 p 258)

Sayers replied to this, reminding Lewis of his own work:

> But in fact, in your prophetic moments, you are with me—that is, if the corrupt artist in *The Great Divorce* is in Hell *because* he is a corrupt artist. He has turned from serving the work and making the work serve him, but for some other reason. And I don't think it matters very much what, or how specious, the other reason is. (*ibid*.)

She maintained a clear distinction between imaginative and apologetic writing:

> I don't really accept the difference between 'art' and 'applied art'. I mean, I think things like *Man Born* and *The Just Vengeance* are just as much shelves as the other, only larger, and (in my case) more honestly constructed. . . . The only rule I can find is to write what you feel impelled to write, and let God do what He likes with the stuff. (*op. cit.* pp 258-259)

It seems to me, reading this, that she is trusting her imaginative intellect to God; not falling into a false spirituality of 'I hate doing this therefore it must be God's will.' She replied to his comment that doctrines never seem dimmer than when he has just defended them (what an insight into the trials of a minister's or priest's life!). She didn't restrict that problem to religion, 'It is a nemesis that attends *all* art and *all* argument' (*ibid*.), particularly in dialectic. Once again she reminds him that physical fatigue has a great influence on perception. 'The first reaction to anything you have just finished is exhaustion and disgust, which transfers itself from the work to the whole subject.' (*op. cit.* p 260) This letter seems to close the issue between them. Their correspondence moves on to other issues, the next letter in Reynolds's edition has Sayers commenting favourably on Lewis's *Miracles*, congratulating him on his honorary doctorate from St Andrews, and telling him about her new hens: 'In their habits they display, respectively, Sense and Sensibility, and I have therefore named them Elinor and Marianne. . . . [she goes on to describe their respective habits and closes with] But you cannot wish to listen to this cackle. . . . .(*Letters* Vol. 3 p 305) Lewis replied: 'I loved hearing about Elinor and Marianne. You are a real letter writer. I am not.' (qtd. *ibid.*)

**Sayers's position**

To support my claim that Sayers was not simply elevating her wants into her 'Christian duty' I turn to a letter Sayers wrote to a young man who had confronted her in the vestry at St Anne's Soho, on Maundy Thursday 1954. He contended that she, like Lewis and Eliot made Christianity too much an intellectual exercise. She wrote back describing her own experience as a Christian, lacking or rather disliking religious emotion, and without, she considered, spiritual experiences, but with a passionate intellect. She wrote that she had nothing to give but the Creeds and the popular reply was:

> 'But do you believe all these petrifying dogmas?'—Listen: it does not matter to you whether I believe or how I believe, because my way of belief is probably not yours. But if you will only leave me in peace until some truth so takes hold of me that I can honestly show it to you through the right use of my own medium, then I will make a picture for you that will be the image of that truth: and that will be not the Creeds but the substance of what is in the Creeds. But unless it is living truth to me, I cannot make it truth to you: I should be damned, and you would see through it anyhow; bad work cannot be hid. (*Letters* Vol 4 p 140)

Her standard is consistent with what she had written to Lewis nine years before. She went on to describe what 'her sort' in which I believe she intended to include Lewis and Eliot, could do:

1. We can write a book, play or other work which genuinely and directly derives from such fragments of religious or human experience as we ourselves have (*The Zeal of Thy House*—the sin of the artist; *The Just Vengeance*—which is about the choosing of God through the only values we know). . . .
2. We can (if we feel like it) write a direct statement about our own experience. (*The Mind of the Maker*). . . .
3. We can show you in images experiences which we ourselves do not know, or know only imaginatively. (*The Man Born to Be*

> *King*). Because in this, we do not need to pretend anything about ourselves. . . .
> 4. We can interpret another man, who has what we have not (we can translate and edit Dante). Our intellect can assess him and our imagination feels what he feels. . . .
> 5. We can, so far as our competence goes, help to disentangle the language-trouble by translating from one jargon to another. For this we need to know both jargons thoroughly. (*op. cit.* p 141-142)

If we look at these five types of work, apologetic work would fall under type 2, a direct statement of our own experience, or type 5, a translation of one jargon into another. Sayers's own non-fiction writing falls into two categories. She wrote about her experience not only in *The Mind of the Maker* but also in pieces such as 'A Vote of Thanks to Cyrus,' 'Why Work?,' 'Creative Mind' and 'Towards a Christian Aesthetic.'[6] She translated the Gospel story from Biblical language to contemporary language in essays such as 'The Greatest Drama Ever Staged' and 'The Triumph of Easter'; she handled the translation of theological jargon into contemporary language in 'Creed or Chaos?' and 'The Dogma is the Drama.'[7] Her proposed 'Oecumenical Penguin,' a project designed to show the unity across the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Free Churches on the Creeds failed because there was never a clear understanding between the theologians and Sayers on their respective responsibilities.

In that letter, she clarified her understanding of the priest's life and responsibilities and distinguishes that role from the role she played as a writer:

> If I were, it would be my profession as well as my vocation to subdue every other consideration to that of preaching to every sort of person; to study the 'contemporary situation' in all its aspects; to learn and make contact with every type of person, so as to be able to speak to their condition and in their language and to present to them the whole content of the Faith, and not only those bits of it on which I could speak with the special authority and sincerity which come of personal experience. In order to perform the last part of the task (which is the perilous part) I should have undergone a training directed (in theory at any rate) to protecting both me and my hearers from the risks of hypocrisy, and providing at least a technique on which to fall back when conviction and inspiration failed me. And also it would be recognised that I did not speak primarily for myself but for the Church—and this, though in some ways it limits the appeal of the official clergy to the common man these days, is in other respects a safeguard for everybody concerned. (*Letters* Vol 4 p 136)

Sayers's understanding of her role was based on her place in the Christian community, a lay person not a priest, the medium she was called to work in imaginative literature, and the presence or absence in the writer's life of experience relevant to the proposed work. Thus, she is not like a carpenter refusing to make bookshelves, but a carpenter refusing to make steel bookshelves, i.e. refusing to work in a different medium although she has general skill in making that would ensure that the finished shelves would hold books. I believe her reluctance to undertake the project stemmed primarily from her belief that she had written all she had to say as a Christian apologist and now was called to work on Dante.

A second reason for the correspondence, I believe, was Sayers's discomfort with Lewis's active intervention into the public battles of their day. She wrote to Brother George Every,

> One trouble about C S Lewis, I think, is his fervent missionary zeal. I welcome his able dialectic, and he is a tremendous hammer for heretics. But he is apt to think that one should rush into every fray and strike a blow for Christendom, whether or not one is equipped by training and temperament for that particular conflict. If one objects that God has put nothing into one's mind on the subject, he darkly hints that one has probably mistaken one's own artistic preferences for the voice of the Holy Ghost. (*Letters* Vol. 3, p 314)

She was not alone in her feeling that Lewis was too quick to react; Brabazon states, 'I myself remember hearing Eliot, on one occasion, mildly wondering whether God really required the strenuous efforts of Dr. Lewis to push him back on to his throne.' (1981, p 235) I may say, that I am grateful that Lewis did write so much and leave us such a heritage. Sayers believed that

> one gets the best of Lewis, not in the apologetics, and certainly not in those Broadcast Talks, . . . but in the three novels and in the Narnia fairy-tales, in which Christ appears as a talking Lion, and even the girls are allowed to take active part in the adventures. Lewis has a remarkable gift for inventing imaginary worlds which are both beautiful and plausible—very unlike the dreary mechanisms of the space-fiction merchants. (*Letters* Vol 4 p 264)

She in her evaluation of Lewis's work as in her own life values the imaginative literature above the expository writing. Both are necessary, but she believes

that her imaginative writing is a better Christian witness. In a letter about the final play in *The Man Born to Be King* she wrote:

> one of the actors came up to me during rehearsal, just after we'd been doing the 'my Lord and my God' bit, and said, 'That's the first time I've ever heard the Atonement explained—so as to mean anything, that is. Which shows the advantage of putting things into words of one syllable, without technical theological terms, and linking them up to the *action of the story*. [emphasis in the original] (*Letters* Vol. 2 p 380)

For effective writing about the destructive power of evil in human lives, a good detective story may make a much more lasting and true impression on the reader than a short treatise on sin. Given Sayers's and Lewis's skills as imaginative writers, skills which are rare especially combined with deep, intelligent faith, it seems reasonable that they should not work in a less congenial medium unless there is a personal experience that the writer can communicate to convey the truth.[8] Lewis paid a tribute to her conception of the Christian artist in his 'A Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers' when he wrote: 'She never sank the artist and entertainer in the evangelist.' (1982, p 122) and goes on to quote her introduction to *The Man Born to Be King*, where she makes clear that her object was not to do good but 'to tell that story to the best of my ability, within the medium at my disposal—in short to make as good a work of art as I could.' (qtd. *op. cit.* p 124)

Lewis's position, which can be interpreted as requiring writers who are Christian and good craftsmen to take up public challenges to the faith, put a higher value on the public conversation about Christianity than Sayers did. Perhaps Sayers's experience as a copywriter taught her how little of the public discourse in newspapers and magazines had any lasting significance and how little of it any readers retained. And perhaps writing copy to sell Christianity was too reminiscent of writing copy to sell Coleman's Mustard, with all the moral ambiguities that working in advertising presented, which she showed in her novel *Murder Must Advertise*.

There cannot, I think, be a final judgement that in their controversy Lewis was right and Sayers was wrong or vice versa. It opens questions of inspiration and craftsmanship as well as deeper theological issues. To say that Sayers was wrong to understand 'the itch' to write as a prompting of the Holy Spirit depends on a theology of total depravity which Sayers, who falls into the tradition of natural theology, would reject. To question our identification of our wants with God's will is the responsibility of every mature Christian aware of how easily each of us can deceive ourselves. Their differences illustrate the richness of the communion of saints, how God can use our limitations to fulfil His purposes; and how much we need to live in dialogue with other Christians.

## Notes

[1] 13 May 1943 see *Letters* Vol. 2 p 409.

[2] 'I am glad you got hold of Lewis(C.S.) I like him very much and always find him stimulating and amusing. One just has to accept the fact that there is a complete blank in his mind where women are concerned. Charles Williams and his other married friends used to sit round him at Oxford and tell him so, but there really isn't anything to be done about it. He is not hostile . . . ( Letters Vol 4 p 263) To Mrs. Robert Darby Sayers wrote: 'Do you like C S Lewis' work, or are you one of the people who foam at the mouth when they hear his name? I find most of his books illuminating and stimulating, but others are put off by his vigorous rationality which they mistake for intellectual arrogance—and I do admit he is apt to write shocking nonsense about women and marriage.' She then recommends *The Problem of Pain*, *The Great Divorce*, and the Space Trilogy (Letters Vol. 3 p 375)

[3] In her speech at the Archbishop of York's conference on The Life of the Church and the Order of Society she said: 'Suppose, during the last century, the Churches had devoted to sweetening intellectual corruption one quarter of the energy they spent on nosing out fornication—or denounced legalized cheating with one quarter the vehemence with which they denounced legalized adultery. But the one was easy and the other was not.' (Malvern 1941 p 72) In the work Lewis mentioned in his letter, 'The Other Six Deadly Sins' she began by noting that at that time, 1941, immorality was synonymous with sexual sin. So she stated: 'About the sin called *Luxuria* or *Lust*, I shall therefore say only three things. First, that it is a sin, and that it ought to be called plainly by its own name, . . . Secondly, that up till now the Church, in hunting down this sin has had the active alliance of Caesar, . . . and Thirdly, there are two main reasons for which people fall into the sin of *Luxuria*. . . . sheer exuberance of animal spirits, . . . or sheer boredom and discontent (1947 p 65-66)

[4] Brabazon quotes this letter and dates it August 8 1946, Barbara Reynolds dates Sayers reply to this August 5 1946. I am taking Reynolds's dating as correct, and propose that Lewis's letter may be dated August 3.

[5] dated 5 August 1946 in *Letters* Vol. 3.

[6] 'A Vote of Thanks to Cyrus,' 'Creative Mind' and 'Towards a Christian Aesthetic' appear in SAYERS, D. 1946. *Unpopular Opinions.* London: Victor Gollancz Ltd. 'Why Work?' appears in SAYERS, D. 1947. *Creed or Chaos/*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

[7] All of these essays are in *Creed or Chaos*? (*op. cit.*)

[8] Lewis's critical work was, of course, part of his vocation as a university don; it may be what he meant when he called himself not a real writer, but a 'half-timer' quoted above page 5.

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# Dorothy Sayers and the Wiles of the Wicked One as Observed in Her Contribution to the Faustus Legend, *The Devil to Pay*

Paul R. Fetters

## Introduction

The reader of the preface to *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis and the preface of *Devil to Pay* by Dorothy Sayers discovers congruency in their beliefs regarding the origin, purpose, and existence of the devil, angels, and demons. Both Lewis and Sayers disclose many of the wiles, schemes, tricks, traps, strategies, deceits, and devices of the Evil One.

In the 1960 preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis presents a lengthy answer to the most common question that he was asked when the book was first published: Do you ". . . believe in the devil?"

> The proper question is whether I believe in devils. . . . I believe in angels, and I believe that some of these, by the abuse of their free will have become enemies of God and, as a corollary, to us. These [angels] we may call devils. They do not differ in nature from good angels, but their nature is depraved. Devil is the opposite of *angel* only as Bad Man is the opposite of Good Man. Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite, not of God, but of Michael [Michael the Archangel].
>
> [My answer is given] not in the sense that it is part of my creed, but in the sense that it is one of my opinions. . . . It agrees with the plain sense of Scripture, the tradition of Christendom, and the beliefs of most men at most times. . . .
>
> (Preface SL, p. vii)

Sayers presents a worthy discussion of the literary views of the Devil in the preface of *Devil to Pay.* However, a more personal conviction is written in her *Letters to a Diminished Church,* Chapter 6, "The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil."

> The actuality of evil exists. . . . Evil is the soul's choice of the not-God. The corollary is that damnation, or hell, is the permanent choice of the not-God. . . .
>
> In the Christian *mythos*, the original head and front of this offending is not placed among mankind. It happened first among another order of created beings. The devils are fallen angels. Satan and his followers chose the not-God, and when they had it, they found that it was hell. In that obduracy they suffer; and into that suffering they endeavor to drag the rest of creation—of which man in particular concerns us. . . .
>
> (Letters DC, pp. 176-177)

From these brief introductory statements, the reader is informed of Lewis's and Sayers's belief in the existence of the devil, demons, and angels; their common understanding of the origin of evil as the angelic choosing of not-God; and their clear articulation of the intent of the Devil to drag the whole of creation—and the human race in particular—into perdition and destruction.

According to the Apostle Paul, the purpose of the Devil is clearly singular as written in the Record. (1 Peter 5:8) However, the wiles of the Devil are deceptively myriad. (Ephesians 6:11) In Screwtape's letters from Hell, the reader catches a glimpse of the villainous wiles of the Devil, all stemming from his depraved disposition as a liar. (SL, p. 4) Thus, the readers of Lewis and Sayers are advised to remember that the Devil is a liar. (John 8:44)

In this paper, I will present a very brief paragraph summary of Lewis's list of the devilish wiles used in *The Screwtape Letters*. In the remainder of the pages allotted, I will analyze the dramatic work of Dorothy

Sayers to garner a list of the wiles, tricks, and devices used by the Devil to blind side or to ambush the children of God. The format of the study will be a perusal of the four scenes of *Devil to Pay* and a summary of insights.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape's advice to Wormwood makes it very clear that the methods of the Devil are selected not to argue with humans, thus enlightening them, but to befuddle their minds, thus stupefying them. "Do remember [Wormwood] you are there to fuddle him." (SL, p. 10) "Jargon is our best ally. . . ." (p. 8) This twisted use of jargon is designed to keep everything "hazy in his mind." Through the use of jargon, the cohorts of hell maintain "maximum uncertainty" within humans through the maligning, misdirecting, and blaspheming of God, along with the slandering of others.

Long before Lewis and Sayers, other writers dating from the 1500s described the wiles of the Devil in works now referred to as the Faustus legend. Two of the most recognized works are *The Tragedical History of Doctor Faustus*, c1588, by a British dramatist, Christopher Marlowe and *Faust*, c1842, by a German author, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Just before World War II and a few years before Lewis published *The Screwtape Letters* in 1942, Sayers's own contribution to the Faustus legend, *Devil to Pay*, opened in London in 1939. Each of the Faustus legends has common episodes and the writing of Sayers is no different.

> In all the other Faust legends certain episodes are reproduced in some form or another in practically all treatments of the subject: Faustus's raising of Mephistopheles; his [Faustus's] disputations with him concerning the nature of God; his twenty-four years' bond to Hell; his journeys to Rome, where he [and Mephistopheles] plays tricks upon the Pope, and [to] the Court of Charles V, where he assists the Imperial armies to achieve their victories in Italy; his having Helen of Troy for his paramour; and the final scene in which the Devil comes to claim his own; . . . (Preface DP, p. 17)

However, the conclusions of the Faustus legends differ. In Christopher Marlowe, Faustus dies and is damned in accordance with the terms of the bond. In Goethe, Faustus is saved by God's grace in spite of his guilt and pride, and the Devil loses a wager for Faust's soul. In Sayers's *Devil to Pay*, Faustus signs the bond and dies but must suffer in purgatory, at the hands of Mephistopheles, before entering heaven.

***Scene One: Wittenberg in Faustus's study***

Scene One opens at Wittenberg, Germany, in the study of Dr. John Faustus, who is weary of the discipline of theology and the slow ways of God in dealing with the ills of the human race. His disillusionment with theology turns to the magical means of alchemy. Faustus, who desires to heal the troubles of mankind with the wave of a wand, declares early, "Oh, God, I am sick at heart. When I see how ill this world is governed, and all the wretchedness that men suffer, I would give my immortal soul to be done with it all. (DP, p. 27) . . . Faustus muses, . . . [what] if magical power can aid me to resolve the mystery of wickedness, lay bare the putrefying sore at the heart of creation. . . ." (p.29) He further ponders, "There must be some meaning to this tormented universe, where light and darkness, good and evil forever wrestle at odds; and though God be silent or return but a riddling answer, there are [other] spirits that can be compelled to speak." (p. 31)

Now, Sayers begins unwrapping the wiles of the Wicked One— his jargon and lies. In a lengthy ritual, her Faustus conjures up Mephistopheles, a minion of Lucifer, the Devil. In his first slanderous declaration, Mephistopheles avows that he is not a liar and claims that all humans are fools.

> What lies have I ever told? There is no need for lying, seeing that mankind are such fools . . . tell them the truth and they will mislead themselves by their own vanities and save me the trouble of invention. I sat by Eve's shoulder in the shadow of the forbidden tree. 'Eat,' said I, 'and you shall become like God.' She and her silly husband ate, and it was so. Where was the lie? Was it my fault if they persuaded themselves that God was everything they hankered to be—all-good, all-wise, all-powerful and possessed everlasting happiness? (p. 34)

This denial was followed by questions that Mephistopheles asked of Faustus which were designed to slander God, the incarnate Christ, and the human race.

> Is He[God] all-wise, that had not the wits to keep out of the mess He had made, but must needs meddle with this business of being a man, and so left matters worse than He found them? . . . And was not that a prime piece of folly, to show up His nature thus—base and ignorant as any carpenter's son, too poor in spirit to argue in His own defense, too feeble to save His own skin from the hangman? . . . What happiness do you find in the history of the Man of Sorrows? (p. 35)

By the consent of Lucifer, Mephistopheles, pledges to do the bidding of Faustus and offers gold to Faustus for buying power:

> All the lost treasure of the world is ours, that men have sweated, toiled, fought, and died to gain, and wasted—the pirate's and the gambler's spoil, the miser's hoard, the harlot's wage, the grudged profits of usury, the assassin's fee, the politician's bribe, the nation's wealth . . . . (p. 41)

Not only is there gold for power, but girls for pleasure. Thus, upon Faustus's request, Mephistopheles offers Helen of Troy, the symbol of the wildest of men's desire, as paramour:

> . . . this is Grecian Helen, hell-born, hell-named, hell in the cities, hell in the ships, and hell in the heart of man. . . . (pp. 40-41)

> Faustus: "Hell and confusion, can you take me to her?"

> Mephistopheles: "I might, but at a cost you may not wish to pay."

The gold provides for Faustus power and wealth for the task of relieving the ills of the world. Proudly, Faustus declares: "If God permits such suffering in this damnable world, He's blind, deaf, mad, cruel, helpless, imbecile or dead! Look, here is gold . . . no man shall want, if Faustus can prevent it." (p. 42)

In the closing of Scene One, a triumphant Mephistopheles turns aside to the mouth of hell and shouts into the abyss: Lucifer, Lucifer! The bird is caught—you may turn off the lights and put the cat out, and shut the door and go downstairs to bed. I shall not be home for supper. (p. 42)

***Scene Two: Rome in the Forum***

Scene Two opens twelve months later. Faustus and Mephistopheles have arrived at the Forum in Rome. Here, Sayers embraces the central point of all Faustus legends: the bartering of the soul to the Devil for twenty-four years. During this time, Faustus will have his youth, girls for pleasure, gold for power, and magic to perform miracles for doing what God cannot or will not do. Mephistopheles will be the servant of Faustus protecting him from any danger and providing the means to do what ever Faustus desires. At the end of the twenty-four years of service, Faustus will be the Devil's servant for eternity.

Faustus's learning is undoubtedly greater and now his powers are unlimited. Here in Rome, the Church is not sure whether his wealth and wisdom are of God or of the Devil. Faustus heals the sick, raises the dead, and corrupts the minds of the poor by his atheistic talk. The churches are empty, and the people throng to Faustus's lectures. The obduracy of Faustus against the Godhead and Church intensifies, and in this scene he barters his soul to the Devil. He is preaching everywhere that, through the powers of Hell, he can abolish pain and suffering from the world. His mind set has reached the point of blasphemy. He declares that the Church is corrupt, her doctrine is a lie, and God is a cruel tyrant.

> I would free you from the burden of fear and pain and poverty that God has laid upon you. Listen to me. If God made all things, He made the evil that torments you, and why should you serve so cruel a master? If He made not all things, He is not God, and you may defy Him as I do. . . . Throw off the bondage of superstition, and learn to know your friends from your foes. . . . God is the enemy of us all. (p. 57)

The Pope pleads with Faustus to repent:

> . . . . Not yet
> Has thy familiar devil persuaded thee
> To that last sin against the Holy Ghost
> Which is, to call good evil, evil good.
> . . . . this sin destroys
> The power to feel His pardon, so that damnation
> Is consequence, not vengeance; and indeed
> So all damnation is.

Before Faustus can consider repentance, Mephistopheles taunts, ". . . . Come, Master—will you take the road to Calvary, and sup at the Skull-and-Crossbones?"

Faustus replies, ". . . Follow Christ? That way is too long and too uncertain." (p. 60) As a diversion, Mephistopheles brings Helen of Troy upon the scene. Once again, Faustus is impassioned for her. Mindlessly, he asks the price.

> "Name the price."

> "The usual price. Your soul."

> "Take it. Sin and soul together."

The bargaining continues. [Regarding eternal youth], Mephistopheles says, ". . . we can't sell you eternal youth upon free hold. I could manage a twenty-four years' lease if that would suit you."

Faustus accepts, "It would be worth it, were it twenty-four hours or twenty-four minutes." Thus the bargain is struck. The bond is brought up from hell, read, and signed:

> Drawn in the name of John Faustus and of me, Mephistopheles. He to abjure and renounce the worship and service of God, and to enjoy in exchange eternal youth and primal innocence for four-and-twenty years; at the end of which term he, the said John Faustus, shall become forfeit to the Devil, and be carried away, soul and spirit, body and bones, to Hell. (p. 68)

Having committed the unpardonable sin to gain eternal youth and Helen of Troy as his paramour, Faustus sets out on a grand tour of the world.

***Scene Three: Innsbruck, The Emperor's Court***

Scene Three opens during the world tour in Innsbruck, Austria, in the emperor's court. The twenty-four bartered years have expired. Faustus and Mephistopheles are assisting Charles V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, in the sacking of Rome.

Mephistopheles is conversing with Azrael, a good angel, who appears on the scene knowing that Faustus has spent the twenty-four years in league with the Devil and is about to die. They discuss the primal innocence (the innocence of animals) that Mephistopheles had given to Faustus, which prevents him from knowing good and evil. Faustus has become ". . . Primitive brutishness. The fellow's grown as mischievous as an ape, lecherous as a goat, giddy as a peacock, cruel as a cat, currish as a cross-bred tyke." (p.78) Mephistopheles continues his conversation with Azrael: "Today, we propose to sack Rome, with lavish accompaniments of loot, rape, and carnage. All this, if you please, by the orders of Faustus, who was once so tenderhearted, he would rescue the fly from the spider . . . ." (pp.77-78)

Now, while viewing the battle, Faustus sees the Empress and desires that she be brought to him tomorrow. Mephistopheles, who now has for twenty-four years waited upon Faustus, replies, ". . . there will not be a to-morrow for you, master. . . . Tonight the compact ends. . . . Then you must die, and be forfeit, both body and soul to hell." (pp. 83-84)

A disillusioned Faustus, considering his youth to be eternal, responds:

> . . . There's no such thing as death or hell. . . . Sin, death, age, sorrow—all that was a foolish dream, and fled like a dream forever. . . . Death comes with creaking bones and a sick carcass. Look at me, Mephistopheles. Have I aged a hair in twenty-and-four years? Not I. Then what's all this talk about death? It touches me not. I am the everlasting youth of the world. I am John Faustus. (p. 84)

As the battle continues, the Emperor desires to have his way with Helen, who now appears high above the Emperor's seat. As Faustus raises a hand to strike the Emperor, Faustus is attacked by the mob for treason. While Faustus, mortally wounded, is being dragged away by the mob, Mephistopheles says, "Faustus, the four-and-twenty years are past. My service is done. The Devil claims his own." (p. 99)

Helen vanishes from the Emperor's embrace and Azrael speaks: "Princes and earthly powers pass like a pageant, and make room for death. Cover the face of Faustus." (p. 100)

As the curtain closes on Scene Three, Mephistopheles and Azrael are contending for the soul of the deceased Faustus. While opening the bag containing the soul of Faustus, Mephistopheles expresses revengeful sentiment regarding his years of service to Faustus:
"Come now, my little master, my high-and-mighty magician, let's have a look at you. Let's see how you like it when I'm the master!" (p. 102) At this moment, out of the bag springs a black dog—the animal that Faustus had become, once he was given primal innocence, thus lacking the knowledge of good and evil. Mephistopheles shrieks in amazement! He had expected the soul of John Faustus, the man—not the soul of John Faustus, the beast.

***Scene Four: The Court of Heaven***

Scene Four opens in the court of heaven. The wiles of Mephistopheles have not changed. He continues spouting his half truths to gain the soul of John Faustus—the man, not the beast.

In the court of judgment, we hear the following dialogue:

Faustus pleads:

> "I was cheated! I did not bargain for a soul like this, but for the primal innocence that was Adam's before he fell to knowledge. . . . Serpent, thou didst deceive me." (p. 109)

Mephistopheles counters:

> So Adam said, and Eve; but I spoke [*truth*] to them and thee. I warned thee that the [*truth*] would but beguile thee, as it beguiles all fools. Thou askedst, 'What was I?' and I spoke the [*truth*]; . . . and 'What God was?' and there I turned the question back upon thee, and thou didst answer it according to thine own folly; but I spoke [*truth*]. (p. 110)

"Oh yes," the Judge responds:

> The truth, but not the whole truth, Mephistopheles . . . the hollow half-truth is the empty dome that roofs the hall of hell, mocking with echoing shards of distorted speech. . . . (p. 110)

The judge renders a decision for Faustus: "God gives thee back again the power to choose, weighing the good and evil. . . ." (p. 112) ". . . Take him, Mephistopheles, and purge him thoroughly, till he find himself, as I have found him mine. God is not robbed; . . ." (p. 119)

**Conclusion**

What insights concerning the wiles of the Devil have been gleaned from *Devil to Pay*? The devil is a liar, the master of fraud, deception, and confusion. He leads the attack on the human race as master of half-truths. He skillfully slanders and continually confuses by raising questions. Each time he speaks, he reveals his underlying wile—slandering in the guise of legitimate questions.

Along with Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters*, this play by Sayers, *Devil to Pay*, is illustrative of the teachings of Holy Scripture. In Genesis 3, the Devil slanders God to man (Adam) as a selfish, impotent tyrant by raising a question about God's goodness, severity, and integrity. His jargon is aimed to confuse good for evil and evil for good. In Job 1, the Devil slanders man to God by raising a question about man's motives, wisdom, and sincerity. Satan considers man unwilling to serve God except for material blessings. In the Gospel of Matthew 4, the Devil slanders Jesus, the God-man, by raising questions about his divine identification and about his incarnate role as Messiah. (VD, pp. 7-8)

In Sayers's *Devil to Pay*, the Devil, a liar, attempts to taunt humans into using illegitimate means for legitimate ends; to emphasize time over eternity; to attain the unattainable goals; to end all suffering; to follow fantasy over reality, to focus on the present rather than the eternal, to emphasize the physical over the spiritual, and promote alchemy over theology. The Devil is constantly and consistently confronting individuals with obfuscating jargon designed to assail, assault, ambush, befuddle, beguile, confuse, cheat, defraud, delude, distort, deceive, misdirect, misconstrue, trick, and trap. All wiles are designed to lure individuals incrementally to perceive vice as a virtue and to give their souls to claim it. Sayers paints an amazingly accurate picture of how the Devil and his demons attack, tempt, twist, and distort all things good with the goal of eternal destruction.

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# Charles Williams: Prophet of Glory

Susan Wendling

*"All else is Love's—this only must be given—*
*a gate, a place, an opening meet for heaven."*
*The Rite of the Passion*

Ever since the last Frances Ewbank Colloquium back in March of '04, which was so wonderfully packed with papers and presentations on C.S. Lewis, George MacDonald, Dorothy L. Sayers, G.K. Chesterton, and J.R.R.Tolkien, I have been wondering at the fact that there were no presentations on the life or writings of "the third Inkling," Charles Williams. At the close of the conference I mentioned this to Dave Neuhouser and he immediately suggested that I "do something," for the next conference in 2006! When I returned back to Philadelphia, with my head and heart full of "C.S. Lewis and Friends," I stumbled upon this description of these people in another book, written by a former Rector of our church:

> Such men are the prophets we need right now, and they will rarely be recognized because they are too radical for the radical; their hopes for a perfect home embarrass the utopian; their certitude is too brave for the guerilla; and their vision of humanity astonishes the humanitarian. They will write poetry in banks and fairy tales in the corners of pubs. Sometimes they will puff pipes and, like T.S. Eliot, call themselves classicists or monarchists or even Anglo-Catholics, bemused at the rage of their cultured despisers who claimed not to be listening. In the end they will not be brightly martyred but, dressed in sack suits and cassocks, will slowly be tightened out of the human parliament for the crime of pronouncing glory instead of mere good.[1]

Today I fight against the idea of the prophet/poet Charles Williams (or "CW" as he is commonly referred to) being "slowly tightened" out of our consideration, for whatever reason, for those who know about him and still read him know that he did indeed "pronounce glory instead of mere good." He deserves to be remembered and read!

Since Tom Howard has recently written that "Williams's name is strictly a name for insiders,"[2] let me just give a barebones outline of his life for those here who don't know him well. Born in 1886 to a poor family in north London, Charles and his family moved to St. Albans in 1894, a cathedral town where the family opened an art supply shop and where Charles was educated. Because of his father's loss of eyesight and the family's financial struggles (Charles did have a younger sister, Edith, for the family to care for), Charles was unable to finish his education at University College, London. A job was found in a Methodist Book Room, and later on, in June, 1908, at the Oxford University Press, where he worked as an editor until his death in May of 1945. He did eventually marry Florence Conway in 1917, a young woman he had met at St. Albans, and they had a son, Michael, who was born in 1922.

In 1939, at the outbreak of WWII, the OUP evacuated its offices from London up to Oxford, and CW, now 53, moved with the Press. His life entered a new phase at this point, as he met Lewis and was immediately drawn into his circle. Lewis and CW talked much about the poet John Milton, and Humphrey Carpenter, in *The Inklings*, quotes Lewis as determined "to smuggle him into the Oxford lecture list, so that we might have some advantage from the great man's accidental presence in Oxford."[3] So, in spite of CW's lack of a university degree, on January 29, 1940, he began a series of lectures on Milton at the University's Divinity School. The second lecture, the following week, was on Milton's poem, "Comus." Here is Lewis's description:

> Simply as criticism it was superb because here was a man who really cared with every fibre of his being about "the sage and serious doctrine of virginity" which it would never occur to the ordinary modern critic to take seriously. But it was more important still as a sermon. It was a beautiful sight to see a whole roomful of modern young men and women sitting in that absolute silence which can *not* be faked, very puzzled but spell-bound . . . That beautiful carved room had probably not witnessed anything so important since some of the great mediaeval or Reformation lectures. I have at last, if only for once, seen a university doing what it was founded to do: teaching wisdom.[4]

At last, with the support of his friends Lewis and Tolkien, Williams was moving in a society of intellectual equals. His academic lecturing load built up until on February 18, 1943, the honorary degree of Master of Arts was conferred on him. In addition, his study on Dante, *The Figure of Beatrice*, was also published in 1943. Hadfield describes this as "a full-length working out of the theology of romantic love in those Dantean terms that had been glanced at in Chapter V of *He Came Down from Heaven* and outlined in *Religion and Love in Dante*.[5] In a way, this was a vindication for Williams, for when he first formulated his ideas of the theology of romantic love in his *Outlines of Romantic Theology* back in 1924, the manuscript was rejected by the Oxford University Press. Humphrey Milford, the Head of the OUP and CW's boss, wrote to him in a note: "I fear this is not for us. It may be for all time and I may be like the poor Indian, but I am afraid of it and of you."[6]

On May 15, 1945, at the close of WWII, Williams died unexpectedly, shocking Lewis and all of his friends. He was 59 years old, and his gravestone simply says "Poet. Under the Mercy." His biographers have noted that these last nine years of his life, from 1936 to 1945, were incredibly productive, with poetry, plays, novels, biographies, reviews, literary criticism and theological treatises on everything from the history of the Holy Spirit in the Church to Witchcraft! This is a tremendous literary output, and is all the more astounding since he not only worked full-time at OUP but also regularly lectured in the evening at various literary institutes around London.

With this brief outline of CW's life in mind, let's examine some comments about Williams, either spoken or written, by his friends. By hearing for yourselves how they reacted to him, you should be stimulated to desire to find out more about this "enigmatic Inkling" and, hopefully, even seek out his writings. After presenting these testimonials from various friends, I will outline certain key ideas that Williams wrote about in all of the varied literary genres mentioned already. Finally, I will conclude by illustrating how CW himself actually embodied the principles he wrote about as he lived his outwardly ordinary and seemingly dull life.

According to a younger poet-friend, Anne Ridler, T.S. Eliot, whom CW had met and become friends with, saw Williams's importance as being, above all, in his supernatural insight. Ridler goes on to quote from Eliot's memorial broadcast in 1946, in which he said also: "Williams . . . seemed to me to approximate, more nearly than any man I have ever known familiarly, to the saint."[7] Later Ridler says that CW exhibited a loving-kindness so remarkable "that it caused T.S. Eliot to inquire of him whether he was to be called the Blessed Charles in his lifetime."[8]

C.S. Lewis, in his "Dedication to Charles Williams" at the beginning of *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, says that CW's lecture on Milton at the Oxford Divinity School had filled his hearers with what we could call today "shock and awe," for he did nothing less than dare to praise the ancient virtue of Chastity and extol its real spiritual power. But listen yourself to Lewis's high praise of Williams:

> . . . but it is a reasonable hope that of those who heard you in Oxford many will understand henceforward that when the old poets made some virtue their theme they were not teaching but adoring, and that what we take for the didactic is often the enchanted. It gives me a sense of security to remember that, far from loving your work because you were my friend, I first sought your friendship because I loved your books . . . [9]

In other words, Lewis is saying that Williams, when he lectured on the old poets, made his hearers learn about adoration and enchantment. Further, at the close of his Dedication, Lewis says that CW has, after more than 100 years of laborious misunderstanding, dared "to recover a true critical tradition."[10] The implication is that CW the poet has woven a new spell, enchanting his hearers by the "adoration" of old poets, and that this has somehow "undone" the old spell of misunderstanding Milton, "for over one hundred years," rather like Sleeping Beauty after her sleep in the forest of thorns for one hundred years being "awakened" by her true Prince! Anne Ridler corroborates Lewis in her wonderful "Introduction" to *The Image of the City and Other Essays*: "Lost in his incantation, he was entirely unconscious of self, so that his hearers, too, became oblivious of the person of the speaker, and felt as though they were transported to the actual fount of the words. 'There is a *chaunt* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth,' wrote Hazlitt, 'which acts as a spell on the hearer and disarms the judgment.'"[11] In *Arthurian Torso*, Lewis says that CW's poetic world "is certainly not a world I feel at home in, any more than I feel at home in the worlds of Dante and Milton. It strikes me as a perilous world full of ecstasies and

terrors . . . There is no snugness in Williams's *Arthuriad*, just as there is none in the *Paradiso*. What quiet there is is only specious: the roses are always trembling, Broceliande astir, planets and emperors at work . . . "[12]

Dorothy L. Sayers read CW's work on Dante, *The Figure of Beatrice*, and was smitten with Dante—so much so that she devoured *The Divine Comedy*, teaching herself Italian and writing lengthy and incredible letters to Williams. He inspired her to undertake translating the *Comedy* into English, and when he died suddenly from an abdominal operation, she responded thus:

> This is very grievous news. Charles Williams was unique in his work and his personality; there is nobody who can take his place. It comes as a great blow to me personally. I was very fond of him and proud of his friendship; and especially at this moment, the work I am trying to do owed so much to him and to his encouragement and inspiration that I feel as though the whole direction of it had been cut off.[13]

And in another letter six days later:

> Charles was a darling—a saint without being a prig or an embarrassment, which is so rare; the sort of person who makes the idea of going to Heaven attractive—one so often feels one would dislike the rest of the population.[14]

Later, in 1954, nine years after his death, Sayers assessed him thus:

> Charles Williams was, as we both know, a major prophet. He could both love and know, and he knew good and evil as no one else knew them. I am sure that in spite of the form of his "spiritual thrillers"—disgusting phrase—he did not think of the spiritual as being wholly from outside. He knew it as both immanent and transcendent—and indeed he knew better than anyone the peril of the immanentist: the outward projection of the self and the failure to acknowledge a "true other." And he knew the peril of the intellectual better than anybody. . . . If Charles had a weakness, it was perhaps a temptation to see himself too readily as Taliessin and Peter Stanhope. He was prompted, I am sure, by his generous love for people; but he did not quite escape permitting a cult of himself. But I hate finding weaknesses in Charles, who showed me so much.[15]

In 1955, she writes to a Professor Foligno, saying that it was Charles Williams who first stimulated her to read Dante, and how much she was on her own to understand him:

> I had to sort it all out for myself. There was only Charles Williams, and he wasn't a textual scholar, but a poet and the interpreter of a way of life: and he died before the war was over . . . [16]

Then, in 1957, she wrote:

> I have always found him illuminating, even when he is most perverse and most alien to me. . . . but I can enter into Charles's type of mind, to some extent, by imagination, and look through its windows, as it were, into places where I cannot myself walk. He was, up to a certain point I think, a practicing mystic. . . . But he is a writer who, if he does not command allegiance, tends to arouse the most violent antipathies . . . [17]

What are we to make of these summations of the various friends of Charles Williams: "saintly," "blessed," "enchanting," "a major prophet," "alien," "a practicing mystic," "unique," and finally, the "interpreter of a way of life?" Just what is going on here? When Dorothy L. Sayers wrote that he was "a major prophet," she went on to say that "he could both know and love." This opens up a clue to us, I think, because the ancient poets and philosophers always connected up knowledge with love. In order to be granted wisdom and knowledge, the seeker after Truth would first have to love God and humbly submit to God's revelation. Only then would knowledge be revealed. This pathway to knowledge being linked to purity of life and love of God is also seen in the ancient practices of alchemy and magic, with this actually being considered an essential preliminary condition of discovery. This mode of thought and approach to knowledge, both philosophical and scientific, also shaped the Rosicrucianism of the 17th century.[18] Before giving more details on how Williams overlapped his knowledge of esoteric magical practices and his mystical Anglo-Catholic beliefs, let me expand more fully on Williams's central and life-long exploration of what has been called "the theology of romantic love."

This "romantic theology," this Dantean "way of Love," as mentioned earlier in this paper, entails three primarily theological concepts: co-inherence, exchange and substitution. These underlie Williams's poetic, romantic and theological thought. His biographer, Alice Mary Hadfield succinctly defines each as follows:

> *Co-inherence*: Christ gave his life for us, and his risen life is in each one if we will to accept it. Simply as men and women, without being self-conscious or portentous, we can share in this life within the divine co-inherence of the Trinity, and in so doing live as members one of another. In our degrees of power, intelligence, love or suffering, we are not divided from God or each other, for Christ's nature is not divided.
>
> *Exchange*: The whole natural and social life of the world works as a process of living by and with each other, for good or bad. We cannot be born without physical exchange, nor can we live without it. But we can each day choose or grudge it, in personal contacts, in neighborhood, and in our society under the law. To practice this approach to co-inherence we can find strength in the risen power of Christ linking all men.
>
> *Substitution*: Another way of approach to co-inherence is by compact to bear another's burden. One can take by love the worry of another, or hold a terror, as one member of Christ's life helping, through that life, another member in trouble.[19]

The Way of Affirmation and the Way of Negation as two paths to heavenly wisdom are also critical to understanding CW's thought. As a poet working in images, CW is primarily a follower of the Way of Affirmation of images; yet he acknowledges the Way of Negation as the way promulgated by the ancient church with its emphasis on asceticism and the denial of self-indulgence. CW's Dante study, *The Figure of Beatrice*, brings all these themes together: "the way of affirmation of images as man's way in to God, the way of romantic love as a particular mode of the same, and the involution of this love with images of the community or City, with poetry and human learning."[20] Yet Williams, always balancing out the paradoxes of life and thought, felt how intermingled these two Ways were, and how the danger of idolatry always lurked behind the adoration of an image as the reality it signified. Beatrice was a God-bearing image to Dante, but she was not God. Over and over in his writings CW states this in a wonderful maxim: "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou." In "Seed of Adam," Williams refers to it as "the maxim that rules the schools of prophets."[21] Gaven Ashenden agrees and says that by "integrating" the two spiritualities of the Negative Way and the Positive Way, the mature Williams was able to develop what Ashenden actually calls "his *prophetic* notion of co-inherence" [my emphasis].[22] It is truly prophetic because it enabled Williams to "overcome the unhealthy division between Spirit and Matter that in various ways has afflicted Christianity since its founding."[23]

Now that you have the basic outline of CW's life in mind, as well as a basic understanding of the great themes of Co-inherence and the Way of the Affirmation of images seen in his developed "theology of romantic love," let me finish by describing in more detail how Williams himself, in his own life, embodied these ideas. His biographer describes how the idea of co-inherence itself came to him early with the death of his friends, Eyers and Nottingham, in WWI, with feeling their bodies return, marching in sudden strangers' footsteps, while

> To walls and window-curtains cling
> Your voices at each breakfasting,
> As the cups pass from hand to hand,
> Crying for drink in No Man's Land.[24]

This poem is from his third volume of poetry, *Divorce*, and was published in 1920. The poet Charles Williams is himself embodying the life-in-death of his friends within the co-inherence of life that his very teacup at his own breakfast has become to him the soldier's tin cup over in the trenches of No Man's Land.

This deepening awareness of all the exchanges and substitutions led Williams to offer himself sacrificially to others, without any regard for whether his doing so would "get him anyplace," as we would think of it. Thus, he poured himself out for years teaching in the evening institutes which were really what we would call today "adult education classes." These classes were not official university courses in English Literature, taught to the upper crust of the English aristocracy. No, these were blue-collar, working class people just attending classes out of personal interest. Yet CW poured out his incantations of poetry and spent time with his pupils. He was so filled with loving kindness to so many kinds of people that his friends all thought him "saintly."

Another place besides the evening institute classes where CW embodied his poetic and theological ideals was at the Oxford University Press. There, CW's love for high ceremony and ritual, embodied in mythic terms, found an outlet during the 1920's. Let me further connect the relationship between CW's Anglo-Catholic mystical theology and his knowledge of ancient esoteric beliefs and practices during these years. Specifically, it is known that from the time of his marriage in 1917 until 1927, Williams attended the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, an esoteric group run by the mystical occultist, Arthur Edward Waite. It is known that CW actually memorized the words of high ritual when he was initiated, and that he thoroughly enjoyed doing so. We also know that Waite's books, particularly *The Secret Doctrine in Israel* and *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*, had a huge influence on Williams's vocabulary, his literary themes, and the occult symbols used in all of his novels. According to Anne Ridler,

reading this latter book marked the origin of Williams's Arthurian studies, which led ultimately to his major poem cycles, *Taliessin Through Logres*, and *The Region of the Summer Stars*. The 1913 book—*The Secret Doctrine in Israel*—laid out a diagram of the Sephirotic Tree upon the figure of a man, thus providing CW with the foundational idea of the body as an index to the cosmos and perhaps also CW's lifelong attempt to develop an adequate theology of marriage.[25] With CW's involvement in Waite's esoteric society kept in mind, then, we must take note that during these years of the 1920's, CW wrote and produced three short plays in verse celebrating the work of the Oxford University Press, two of which were actually performed by CW and his co-workers for the entertainment of the staff!

Because of time constraints , I will stop at this point and invite you all to attend my second presentation on CW, which will examine how Williams went even further to embody his mythic ideals in his founding of an Order of the Companions of the Co-Inherence in 1939. We will explore Williams's theological ideas implicit in his beloved concept of Co-Inherence, and in doing so discover in a sense that Williams the Poet and Prophet of Glory, also functioned as a "Priest," leading his friends and now us his readers deeply into a vision of sacramentalist spirituality which is, according to CW, the "Actuality of the Universe." All of the poetry, plays, novels and theological treatises themselves embody this specific mystical vision of this "knight of faith."

### Notes

[1] George Rutler, *Priest and Priestess* (Rosemont, PA: The Good Shepherd Press, 2003 reprint), p. 44.
[2] Tom Howard, "What About Charles Williams," in *Touchstone*, December 2004, p.33.
[3] Quoted in Alice Mary Hadfield, *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), p. 187.
[4] Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), p. 119.
[5] Hadfield, pp. 206-7.
[6] Cited in Hadfield, p. 45.
[7] Anne Ridler, "Introduction," in *Charles Williams: "The Image of the City" and Other Essays* (London: Oxford UP, 1958), p. xxviii.
[8] Ridler, p. xxx.
[9] C.S. Lewis, "Dedication," in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford UP, rep. 1967), p. v.
[10] *Ibid*, p. vi.
[11] Ridler, p. xx.
[12] Cited in Stephen Medcalf, "Objections to Charles Williams," in *Charles Williams: A Celebration*, edited by Brian Horne (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Cromwell Press, 1995), pp. 215-216.
[13] *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Vol. 3: 1944-1950: A Noble Daring*, chosen and edited by Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 1998), p. 146.
[14] *Ibid*., p. 147.
[15] *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Vol. 4: 1951-1957: In the Midst of Life*, chosen and edited by Barbara Reynolds (Cambridge: Carole Green Publishing, 2000), p. 143.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
[17] *Ibid*., p. 394.
[18] Gaven Ashenden, "Charles Williams and the Tradition of Alchemy," in *Seven*, Vol 18, p. 54.
[19] Hadfield, p. 32, bottom Note.
[20] Hadfield, p. 209
[21] Charles Williams, *Seed of Adam and Other Plays* (London: Oxford UP, 1948), p. 12.
[22] Gaven Ashenden, p. 51.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 51.
[24] Cited in Hadfield, p. 32.
[25] Ridler, p. xxv.

**G.K. Chesterton Teaches the Millennial College Student**

Drucella M. Crutchfield

Suicide, the second leading cause of death among college students, ("Young . . .") hyper-tech violent entertainment, and a pragmatic search for truth bears witness to this millennial generation's voice converging with G.K. Chesterton's own search for eternal truths. Apparently, in his earlier poems Chesterton also wrangles with the validity of his own life. In "Thou Shalt Not Kill," he plunges into morbid thoughts before the voice of reason releases him from the death hound:

> I had grown weary of him; of his breath
> And hands and features I was sick to death . . .
> But ere I struck, my soul's grey deserts through
> A voice cried, 'Know at least what thing you do' . . .
> Then I cast down the knife upon the ground
> And saw that mean man for one moment crowned . . .
> The man that I had sought to slay was I.
> ("Thou Shalt Not Kill" lines 1-2, 7-8, 15, 16 and 18)

While Chesterton does overcome the agony of despair and despondency, he clearly maintains a romance with the intrigue of death by the blade.

According to Christopher Derrick, who describes C.S. Lewis and Chesterton as "fat men whom I used to meet casually," Chesterton had a "clearly pathological thing about fighting and bloodshed and the sword." Derrick goes on to portray this phenomenon as "a strange thing in a Christian writer," revealing that Chesterton less likely used "dueling as a metaphor for the spiritual combat" and more likely "freely indulged" in his love and excitement of "the idea of actual swordsmanship, actual bloodshed, and killing . . ." (8). Just so, today's student (even one of the Christian variety) finds strange entertainment and excitement in the digital world of violence, maiming and killing everything and everyone from outer planetary aliens to the local pimps, pushers, and cops. Like his contemporary counterpart who keeps his X-Box® handy for quick action, Chesterton himself, described by Derrick as "the gentlest of men," also kept "'a vast collection of swords and daggers and rapiers' in his house; and when dictating to a secretary, it was his practice to stride about with one of these, stabbing and spearing at the cushions" (7).

Despondent, anorexic, self-mutilating and often suicidal, this millennial generation cries out for unfailing love. Even while being overly fed, overly entertained, and overly protected, they cry out with a desire for life that Chesterton aptly describes in Saint Thomas Aquinas, as "the universal human hunger and even fury for Life"(113). Living in a post-modern society, their "fury for Life" demands reason and experience, something their "helicopter" parents often fail to offer. For others coming from homes that boast of single parent, same-sex parents, grandmother only, aunt, uncle, or sometimes just someone's boyfriend or girlfriend as being the "concerned care-giver," these self-seekers cry out much like Chesterton does in Heretics:

> Whether the future excellence lies in more law or less law, in more liberty or less liberty; whether property will be finally concentrated or finally cut up; whether sexual passion will reach its sanest in an almost virgin intellectualism or in a full animal freedom; whether we should love everybody with Tolstoy, or spare nobody with Nietszche;—these are the things about which we are actually fighting most. (36-37)

Our students today seek that same "future excellence." They are sick and tired—tired of hurting and twisted social norms, tired of learning to live in failed

relationships that leave them feeling like part of the divided property, tired of trying to live up to steroid-buffed athletes and tan-toned models. They haunt the offices of their professors as purveyors of wisdom and nurturers of intelligent, reasonable humanity. Herein lies the opportunity—a useful tool provided by Chesterton himself to reach this challenged and challenging generation.

Classical literature, more often than not, remains an anomaly among the typical college student today; even so are the student's academic skills problematic in the writing genres. For the question, "What book have you read recently?" common answers abound: "If it's not on the internet, I don't read it," or "I don't read books, but I watch movies that come from books!" And of writing—"If it's not in an e-mail or instant messaging, I don't write." For these unbelievable challenges, the teacher of both literature and argumentative writing finds purpose in teaching G.K. Chesterton. Not only does Chesterton's work provide the scarlet thread of Christian truths that weaves unity throughout his works and furnishes the only real answer for these emotionally and spiritually faltering college students, but his poetry, fiction, fantasy, essays, and arguments stir up their analytical and rhetorical skills.

This scarlet thread imparts to the millennial student answers to academic and spiritual satisfaction, and it also acts as a signifier for "all that is best" in Chesterton. In his essay, "The Legendary Chesterton,[1]" the Rev. Ian Boyd, speaks of "the two apparently contradictory legends . . . the aggressive champion and apologist for Catholicism [or] . . . the relaxed Edwardian figure," and he challenges Chesterton critics to "rescue all that is best in each of the competing legends." Boyd continues, "Chesterton is, after all, a single human being as well as a single writer" (62-63). This "single human being . . . single writer" supplies delightfully kind and contradictorily argumentative models for most genres of literary writing and provides volatile, passionate, and sometimes humble rhetoric in the form of classical literature most suitable for sharpening the critical thinking skills of young minds while also empowering a vehicle of directional healing for the lost and hungry soul.

In a 2005 conference, *Working with the New Millennial Student,* Anne Leavitt describes such students as those who "find it hard to engage in original thought processes; don't show initiative; [and] mentally are 'out of shape.'" What better way to prod these slumbering minds than to introduce Dickens through G.K. Chesterton's Charles Dickens. Chesterton shows the reader a masterful tapestry that weaves the boy Dickens and the man Dickens into his books from *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* to *David Copperfield* and *Dombey and Son*. In his "Introduction" to this Chesterton work, Steven Marcus pegs it correctly:

> For once Chesterton is not exaggerating, and this ability to gaze unwaveringly into human folly and misery and see its connection with ourselves is one of Dickens's greatest gifts to us . . . And Chesterton is correct to connect it at several points not only to the French Revolution and the radical humanitarianism of Dickens's time, but to Dickens's Christianity, his literal, his primitive Christianity. (xvi)

Moreover, as students are pointed to select passages not only from Chesterton's critical book of Dickens but also from Dickens's books themselves, these new millennial students will begin to identify with the conflicts and hold on to the truths discovered therein. And once they are saturated with these fundamental truths, their attention should be turned to the near end of Charles Dickens, where Chesterton helps the reader identify the real truth in life, which is "There are some men who are dreary because they do not believe in God; but there are many others who are dreary because they do not believe in the devil" (285). Chesterton, through his own life experiences, knew all too well that the only way to overcome the conflicts in this world is to recognize that evil truly does exist and can only be conquered through battle. He turns the credit for this truism all to Dickens, however, as he says, "This life of ours is a very enjoyable fight, but a very miserable truce. And it appears strange to me that so few critics of Dickens or of other romantic writers have noticed this philosophical meaning in the undiluted villain" (285). Amazingly unnoticed is Chesterton's subtle use of Scripture to point the reader to the "essential truth" in winning the battle: "For the full value of this life can only be got by fighting; the violent take it by storm," (285) paralleling Christ's own teaching: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Thompson: Matthew 11:12 KJV). Identification is a key element in learning as well as in healing; this generation who finds entertainment, release, and solution in fighting will quickly identify with these words of Dickens, Chesterton, and Christ.

From Dickens, one can encourage the students' bend to fantasy and understanding the fantastical through the once-more popular J.R.R. Tolkien. Tolkien cleverly ties Dickens and Chesterton together in thought and deed in The Tolkien Reader:

> Of course, fairy-stories are not the only means of recovery, or prophylactic against loss. Humility is enough. And there is (especially for the humble) *Mooreeffoc*, or Chestertonian Fantasy. *Mooreeffoc* is a fantastic word, but it could be seen written up in every town in this land. It is Coffee-room, viewed from the inside through a glass door, as it was seen by Dickens on a dark London day; and it was

> used by Chesterton to denote the queerness of things that have become trite, when they are seen suddenly from a new angle. (77-78)

But Tolkien does not stop there in regard and respect to Chesterton as his master in word and thought. Indeed, students delightfully discover that a notion they hold as contemporary because of the fast moving pace of their hyper cyber-world, Tolkien brings into play as an annoyance to the world of fantasy eagerly giving Chesterton credit for birthing the notion. As a model of such notion, Tolkien refers to electric streetlights that should "be excluded from the tale simply because they are bad lamps"; instead, he says that "out comes the big stick: 'Electric lamps have come to stay." Tolkien describes the discoveries of the "Robot Age" as combining an "elaboration and ingenuity of means with ugliness and (often) with inferiority of result." This "ugliness," as a result, fosters new and better discovery. Tolkien supports his thoughts through a Chesterton nugget of wisdom: "Long ago, Chesterton truly remarked that, as soon as he heard that anything 'had come to stay,' he knew that it would be very soon replaced—indeed regarded as pitiably obsolete and shabby" (80).

Along with the rising popularity of Tolkien and MP3 players, the millennial students are oft heard saying, "Don't buy it now; wait awhile. They'll come out with a better version soon." After all, one only needs to look to the continual forward numbering of any good software product. In their hurry-up-and-wait, fast-paced, instant gratification world, the students' look at an early Tolkien reading with a conservative sprinkling of Chesterton can only encourage them in the idea that society really has not gone mad in its forward progress. Or as Chesterton states, "Progress, in the good sense, does not consist in looking for a direction in which one can go on indefinitely. For there is no such direction, unless it be in quite transcendental things, like the love of God. It would be far truer to say that true progress consists in looking for the place where we can stop" ( Fancies versus Fads 193). Knowing that their iconic author of Lord of the Rings holds dear to Chestertonian philosophy tickles their curiosity as they prepare to read passages from The Everlasting Man.

To continue encouraging the student's growth through mental weight-lifting exercises and as the flint for sparking original thought, one should try Chesterton's The Everlasting Man. Using the "Introduction: The Plan of this Book," the professor could help students prepare an outline of classical argument structure. Before young readers even get into the meat of the book, disagreement, conflict, and yet problem solving and resolution fight to become the ruling status of their millennial identification. Depending on whether they are insiders (with their millennial peers), "outlyers" (those more life-challenged and desperate), or evangelicals (faith-based values), finding Chesterton's thesis will generate passive acceptance, draw confused looks, or spark volatile debate: "The point of this book, in other words, is that the next best thing to being really inside Christendom is to be really outside it. And a particular point of it is that the popular critics of Christianity are not really outside it" (9).

Chesterton further muddies the waters for young thinkers with this idea: "When the world goes wrong, it proves rather that the Church is right. The Church is justified, not because her children do not sin, but because they do" (10). And then, just in case he has missed pushing the buttons of one of these three youthful groups, Chesterton adds,

> It is the contention of these pages that while the best judge of Christianity is a Christian, the next best judge would be something more like a Confucian. The worst judge of all is the man now most ready with his judgments; the ill-educated Christian turning gradually into the ill-tempered agnostic, entangled in the end of a feud of which he never understood the beginning, blighted with a sort of hereditary boredom with he knows not what, and already weary of hearing what he has never heard. (11)

Once again, Chesterton's fascination with dueling supplies him with the perfect metaphor. At this point, the student is usually reeling with curiosity, doubt, and yes, even anger. In some way, the student decides that Chesterton has abandoned the idea of mere mortals growing up to be the ideal Christian. However, Chesterton begins to redeem himself as he turns us back to the difficult journey of Christian living, "So also in the specially Christian case we have to react against the heavy bias of fatigue . . . for the fallen man it is often true that familiarity is fatigue" (17).

However, the real beauty of teaching as argument The Everlasting Man comes with the necessity of student response to the argument. Once the reader becomes immersed in "The Strangest Story in the World," he or she usually tries to accept the challenge to have "in the true sense a superior mind . . . and to think . . . on three planes at once" (201). The student is faced with Chesterton's powerful story of the Sacrificial Lamb as he relates to the reader the startling realization that the purveyor of all miracles, Christ, performed the "supremely supernatural act, of all his miraculous life, that he did not vanish" (208). Chesterton elaborates about the power of the gospel: "The grinding power of the plain words of the Gospel story is like the power of mill-stones; and those who can read them simply enough will feel as if rocks had been rolled upon them" (209). And finally, Chesterton gently leads the reader to discover a great salvation truth. "All the great groups that stood about the Cross represent in one way or

another the great historical truth of the time; that the world could not save itself" (210).

Joseph L. Martinez of the Christian Ministries Department of Trinity International University reminds us that no longer does the university student raised in church stay in church or stay connected with a ministry. This contributes to the idea that if the Church cannot keep its own children, then she will not attract those who were never her children. Therefore, Chesterton would think little of educators who take these new millennial students only to the point of grasping that scarlet thread of Christian redemption which he so masterfully weaves throughout all of his writing. What Chesterton would expect from us is to strengthen the weave with yet another thread of Chesterton's self-discovered realism check. One can find that in Heretics, where Chesterton describes the three mystic virtues as being "faith, hope, and charity" (156).

In Heretics, Chesterton uses the essay "Paganism and Mr. Lowes Dickinson" to relate to the reader "one broad fact about the relations of Christianity and Paganism, which is so simple that many will smile at it, but which is so important that all moderns forget it. The primary fact about Christianity and Paganism is that one came after the other" (156). While to the typical surface readers, this statement may appear somewhat simplistic, the newly-sharpened contemporary readers will begin to dig deeply into this truth to gain its fullness. They will have learned by now a simple Chestertonian truth: "The more simple an idea is, the more it is fertile in variations" (All Things Considered 206).

Chesterton uses chronology to speak of the real difference between Paganism and Christianity and that is the *virtues of grace*. One may differ with Chesterton as to the origination of the three mystical virtues; yet, Chesterton maintains that Christianity invented rather than adopted these virtues—faith, hope, and charity. The pagan virtues he speaks of as "justice and temperance are the sad virtues and … the mystical virtues of faith, hope, and charity are the gay and exuberant virtues" (158). While Chesterton winds the reader's mind in and out of what he calls "all three practical, and . . . all three paradoxical" (161), he nevertheless reminds the reader that "Whatever may be the meaning of faith, it must always mean a certainty about something we cannot prove" (162).

Chesterton offers a message of "hope" to the student of today, a scarlet ribbon of salvation woven gently throughout his works. Chesterton knows and understands this student; after all, he lived through the same types of despondency, and he questioned his way through the whole process of life:

> Speller of the stones and weeds,
> Skilled in Nature's crafts and creed,
> Tell me what is in the heart
> Of the smallest of the seeds.
> ("The Holy of Holies" lines 9-12)

And the answer he found then should be the one that we offer our students today:

> God Almighty, and with Him
> Cherubim and Seraphim,
> Filling all eternity, —
> *Adonai Elohim*. (Ibid lines 13-16)

## Notes

[1]Boyd, Ian, C.S.B. "The Legendary Chesterton." G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy. Macdonald, Michael H. and Andrew A. Tadie, Eds. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing. 1989.53-68.

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# An Apologetic for Marriage and the Family from G.K. Chesterton

Randy Huff

G.K. Chesterton was regarded by friend and foe as a man of genius, a defender of the faith, a debater and conversationalist par excellence. As a journalist he wrote thousands of essays; as a biographer he confounded the scholars. His large body of fiction is most well-known through the *Father Brown Mysteries* which are still published, as is much of his work.[1] He inspired C.S. Lewis, who listed *The Everlasting Man* in the top most influential books in his life. His biography of St. Thomas Aquinas was hailed by eminent Thomist scholar Etienne Gilson as "without possible comparison, the best work on Aquinas."[2] He was successful in marriage and with his extended family, and though he and Frances bore the pain of childlessness, they were greatly loved by children.

Chesterton lived from 1874 to 1936, and his task in life was to trumpet the truths that are rooted in common sense and the very nature of things. He believed that we can discern what *is* from life as we see it (the fall being fundamental to such a vision). For Chesterton, "The business of a man is to discover reality and, having discovered it, to hand it on to his fellows."[3]

My task today is to present his defense for marriage and the family. For Chesterton, the family is integral to what it means to be human. Tradition, convention, and, as he put it, the "dumb certainties of experience"[4] are the votes of the dead which we ignore to our peril.[5] Chesterton believed the fact of marriage and family as central realities with intrinsic norms expresses some of those certainties, and he had a great deal to say about it. We will look at some of what he said, but before we do, a glance at his apologetic approach is merited. I see three main points in his apologetic:

1. **Truth fits the human spirit:** So far from leaving God out, this approach insists God is very much *in*, for He created the human spirit, and created it in His very image, no less. Thus, for Chesterton, if a thing doesn't fit the human spirit, it must go. "If a house is so built as to knock a man's head off when he enters, it is built wrong."[6] In the conclusion to *What's Wrong with the World*, he sums it up thus: "all institutions shall be judged and damned by whether they have fitted the normal flesh and spirit."[7]
2. **Truth transcends time:** He believes it is possible to speak from verities fixed in human nature and thus **not subject to times and seasons in any fundamental sense**. If all notions are determined by pre-conditioning then everything devolves backwards until ultimately, there are no ultimates—*all* is bias. There is, he says, a "degrading modern heresy that our minds are merely manufactured by accidental conditions, and therefore have no relation to truth at all . . . . This thought is the end of all thinking. It is useless to argue at all, if all our conditions are warped by our conditions. *Nobody can correct anybody's bias if all mind is all bias.*"[8] Thus, Chesterton's argument for marriage and family is an attempt to give us some 'ultimates,' some foundational truth.
3. **Truth does not proof-texting:** For Chesterton, a man who lived **require** and wrote within the continuing rise of rationalism and secularism in early 20th century London, **the apologetic had to present the sanity of orthodoxy without quoting Scripture or even referencing theology as such**.[9] This, he says, is a very restrictive requirement, but necessary, given the audience. He believed the experience of generations of humanity revealed some indelible facts about life, and that these facts were discernible and fixed, not to be tampered with. With an apologetic thus grounded in life, it is hoped that his argument for marriage and the family can speak to any listener who is deaf to Scripture and the Christian tradition but, being alive, cannot be *entirely* deaf to life.

If you know Chesterton, you know that the word "systematic" has little bearing on his mode of

expression. He casts about, one wonders where or why, only to confound you by drawing it all together in a piece you never imagined possible. And so, though I love that genius, it can make the analytical task maddening. However, I believe such a problem is integral to the subject at hand, for it is so close to life that we are swimming in the subject while trying to understand it. As he suggested, trying to systematize innate reality is like landing Leviathan with a hook and line.[10] My solution is to attempt to reflect his thinking in a similar style. While I have divided today's discussion into two main divisions, there will be several defenses throughout—defenses that inter-relate, casting about, attempting to reveal the life that shines through any true discussion of marriage and family. In the process, let us hope the Truth Chesterton defends is the Leviathan that lands us.

**Celebrating Family as Foundational to Life**

> "the oldest of the earthly cities" [11]

Chesterton defended marriage and the family, first of all, by celebrating the family as the central reality of human life. As he put it:

> "I really think there was a moment when I could have invented the marriage vow (as an Institution) out of my own head; but I discovered, with a sigh, that it had been invented already."[12]

And then,

> "I do not dream of denying, indeed I should take every opportunity of affirming, that monogamy and its domestic responsibilities can be defended on rational apart from religious grounds."[13]

And finally,

> "Two facts must be put at the very beginning of the record of the race. The first is original sin. The second . . . is the family."[14]

And so we ask: "How is the family foundational?" First, in the way the family reflects the Holy Family and the trinitarian vision therein.[15] In this, admittedly, we are into theology proper, unusual for Chesterton, and *contra* his apologetic approach as noted above. Since he is going to the soul of things here—trying to explain reality, it is perhaps permissible for him to push things to theology, for how else does anyone get to the ultimates a without defining god thereby; or in this case, letting God define those ultimates.

Be that as it may, Chesterton said that as the holy family of Bethlehem brought the Saviour to the world, so the human family is a 'sacrament' of grace, a daily means of redemption for all who celebrate it by partaking in and of it as they are able. Of course he is using Bethlehem as the starting point. When he speaks of family as a trinity, he is clearly speaking to the idea that the family reflects *the* Holy Family—the mystery of Trinity that is the Godhead. Within this Trinitarian model one finds the basis for understanding family as it should be understood. That being true, as marriage is the foundation of the family, it would be hard to find a stronger case for its importance; for when we participate in marriage and family, we are demonstrating, *and participating in*, an expression of the very nature of God.[16]

Approaching this theme from a different angle, Chesterton says we must celebrate the distinction between the sexes; that to call a man 'manly' or a woman 'womanly' is to touch the deepest philosophy.[17] Chesterton has many fascinating treatments of the diversity of the sexes and the natural divide between them, coupled poignantly with the mad desire to be joined. As he put it, "Those whom God has sundered, shall no man join," his artful way of reminding us that only God could join such impossibly divided persons.[18] One of my favorite references to this diversity within union is this selection, well worth its length:

> ". . . the sexes are two stubborn pieces of iron; if they are to be welded together, it must be while they are red-hot. Every woman has to find out that her husband is a selfish beast, because every man is a selfish beast by the standard of a woman. But let her find out the beast while they are both still in the story of 'Beauty and the Beast.' Every man has to find out that his wife is cross—that is to say, sensitive to the point of madness: for every woman is mad by the masculine standard. But let him find out that she is mad while her madness is more worth considering than anyone else's sanity."[19]

In this we see the actual state of the matter—men and women are different and yet they are driven to find a way to unite. Once again, unity and diversity are held together in the intrinsic relationship of the sexes.

This is expanded and seen in yet another way, what I call "family as 'uni-versity.'" Because the family is able to combine unity and diversity, it serves as the foundation for society. The family, not the individual *or* the state, is the answer to the problem of societal organization. The home is greater than the government and it also supersedes the individual. Both one and many bow to the home, for it best balances the impossible see-saw of individual vs. state. For this reason the home is the sentinel for freedom. It keeps both individual and state at bay by combining the essence of both within itself. Thus the family supports both: individuals by birthing them and states by populating them. For either individual or state to work against the family is to cut off the limb upon which they sit.

Finally, marriage and family is foundational to life because only within sexual union can life itself be created. The possibility of children is written into the relation of the sexes, and denying that reality is to undo a central component of the relationship. For Chesterton, removing the possibility of children from marriage steals "the pleasure belonging to a natural process while violently and unnaturally thwarting the process itself."[20] These lines from *GK's Weekly* in 1930 continue the theme:

> "What strikes me as truly extraordinary is the implication that there is something low about the objective [of sexual union] being the birth of the child. . . . it is obvious that this great natural miracle is the one creative, imaginative and disinterested part of the whole business. The creation of a new creature, not ourselves, of a new conscious center, of a new and independent focus of experience and enjoyment, is an immeasurably more grand and godlike act even than a real love affair . . . . If creating another self is not noble, why is pure self-indulgence nobler?"[21]

Here we see the foundational sense coming full circle. It begins with grounding in the nature of God, it continues by seeing the family as the grandest human answer to the problem of bringing union within diversity, and it finishes by emphasizing again the necessity of the relationship being more than binary; that is, the relationship is not complete unless *otherness*—in this case the possibility of children—is considered. Marriage and the family are indeed *necessary to the way God made the world*. Chesterton would have agreed with Joseph Strong, naming marriage as the "parent, and not the child of society; the source of civility and a sort of seminary of the republic."[22]

**Denying the Superstition of Divorce**

> "The idea of a vow "is to combine the fixity that goes with finality with the self-respect that goes with freedom."[23]

Well, to press on, pulling in the Leviathan, landing ourselves on Chesterton's points. Chesterton defends marriage and family by celebrating its innate, foundational truths and by offering ways we can strengthen this most vital of institutions. Here I propose to deal only with Chesterton's treatment of divorce, a discussion which points up the necessary issues at stake, and thereby can strengthen the home as well as anything.

In this case the Leviathan may devour us, for what is more contentious, more heart-rending, more devastating than the modern demise of marriage and the divorce that is cause and symptom of so much of it? I would beg deference for a few minutes, an attempt to put the question into a rational box for consideration. A too well-known statistic tells us that half of all marriages end in divorce. Among all of the answers we hear, precious few seem to speak to the meaning—the being of marriage and the corollary questions about divorce itself. If they do nothing else, Chesterton's proposals will jolt us, break into our cultural malaise and unthinking, and perhaps enable us to see what really underlies the question.

"On this question of divorce," Chesterton said, "I do not profess to be impartial, for I have never perceived any intelligent meaning in the word."[24] His approach echoed another friend of Lewis, Charles Williams, who said: "Adultery is bad morals, but divorce is bad metaphysics."[25] In his outstanding compilation of excerpts from Chesterton on the family, *Brave New Family,* Alvaro de Silva comments on the necessity of proper metaphysics, saying "society's survival and success depend on true metaphysics more than good morals" for, at the end, "the morals . . . of a people are the ripe fruit of its metaphysics."[26] So the question speaks to the being of a thing—in this case the being of marriage and the question of whether such a being can be undone.

Chesterton is saying that if marriage is really the "combination that does combine," it is troublesome to think we can negate such a combination with a legal construct such as divorce.[27] Indeed, Chesterton's belief in the metaphysical status of marriage is so strong that while divorce may rarely be justified, re-marriage never is.[28] Divorce may be a necessary evil in extreme cases; re-marriage is simply not real in any metaphysical sense. This echoes the vow—'til death do us part'—and insists that it is more than a self-created legal union; rather it recognizes the indelible union of the sexes which cannot be literally—metaphysically—undone while the persons are still living.

I come from a beloved, sectarian-Protestant, country church background. Nonetheless, when I read Chesterton on this point I do not see "marriage-as-

sacrament" or some other such construct that brings religion into the picture to trounce the secular mind. Rather I see the legitimate appeal to the *being* of this thing we call marriage. If we really think it as an *union of persons*, do we really believe it can be dissolved in the cavalier manner of the modern divorce court—or for that matter, dissolved at all? As has been wearily recognized, easy divorce makes easy marriage, and too much of both will doom a culture. Such was Chesterton's prophecy 100 years ago and it rings hauntingly true today.

Chesterton goes further to say it would be one thing if divorce advocates only wanted liberty for bound parties. But what they really mean to do is *to give the same respectability to divorce that we give to marriage*.[29] Marriage has respectability for many reasons, not the least being the beauty of fidelity itself, the "glamour [of the] vow."[30] Fidelity is respected. How rational is it to accord the same respect to infidelity?[31] In picturing this, Chesterton suggests that toasts to divorce could be drunk, etc. and guests would assemble "on the doorstep to see the husband and wife go off in opposite directions."[32] This speaks to the question of why we marry in church but divorce in court. If the doing and undoing are legitimate, should not the church do, and approve of, both?

So what of the hard cases? Nobody denies, says Chesterton, "that a person should be allowed some sort of release from a homicidal maniac. The most extreme school of orthodoxy only maintains that anybody who has had that experience should be content with that release."[33] It may be permissible to complain that you are married; do not then persist in complaining of being unmarried once divorced.[34] In this matter he is the helpful realist, reminding us that fidelity is demanding—freedom requires "vigilance and pain."[35] He is saying most clearly that the family is important enough to merit great suffering.

Chesterton's emphases on this point are all about mankind being all it is intended to be; he has this ever-present ideal in mind, something toward which we are to progress. It is vital in the hardships of life to have some hope, some purpose. Chesterton believes the purpose for man is to be blessed, but that "men must suffer to be beautiful, and even suffer a considerable interval of being ugly."[36] Herein lies the truth of "the second wind" as Chesterton calls it. Without constancy and perseverance in marriage, the potential value and beauty cannot be realized. The tragedy of most divorces is that a couple quits before they have given the marriage enough time to really grow and become deeply rewarding. Indeed, perseverance in keeping one's vows is itself a reward worth having—the "glory of the vow." When we elevate divorce, metaphysically, to the level of marriage we make it too easy for couples to miss out on the rewards of fulfilling their vows.

Finally, Chesterton reminded us of this all too painful truth: mutually desired divorce is very seldom the reality. Again, a lengthy quote helps to establish his point:

> " . . . if we are really to fall back on the frank realism of our experience as men of the world, then the very first thing that our experience will tell us is that . . . the consent [for divorce] very seldom is sincerely and spontaneously mutual. By far the commonest problem in such cases is that in which one party wishes to end the partnership and the other does not. And of that emotional situation you can make nothing but a tragedy, whichever way you turn it."[37]

Here surely we can see the pain and poignancy of life as it is, putting the matter in true perspective. Divorce is no friend and perhaps, as Chesterton would have us believe, embracing it as we have will be our undoing.

**Summary**

After the deeply painful reminder of the brokenness of our world which a discussion of divorce elicits, I am happy to return to the basis for Chesterton's argument. It is fair to say that He saw the family as the *summum bonum* within the Created order, God's grand design for making the world work. Chesterton celebrated marriage and family because he celebrated the life God had made. He knew this life could never be enjoyed fully without that fundamental societal unit, the family, protected and nourished, given its place as paramount. From this flow all of his defenses, and they can help us a great deal today in the morass that is the legacy of the sexual revolution.

And so the family, like the Sabbath, is a gift. If we keep it, it will keep us. Indeed, we were not made for the family—persons to be fitted into an 'institution.' Rather, the family was made for us, a haven, a home, a place that makes sense of the world if we will let it. Such was Chesterton's argument—may it bring added life to the vital struggle to strengthen the home.

**Notes**

[1] Ignatius Press plans well over 40 volumes in *The Collected Works* project.

[2] Garry Wills, *Chesterton: Man and Mask*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 216, n. 9.

[3] Janet Gassman, "Religion and the Arts: A Second Look at G.K. Chesterton," *Religion in Life* 28:3 (Sum, 1959): 444, quoting from *The Saturday Review of Literature* 14:3-4 (July 4 1936). Chesterton had died 3 weeks prior.

[4] G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics/Orthodoxy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 180.

[5] Ibid., 207. In this one also sees his implicit insistence that the history of the world is reasonable and

consistent with itself. Life is not about a random occurrence of events with no bearing in a composite, underlying reality. In a word, he believed in Truth that was reasonably discernible, and that it was folly, and led to sheer anarchy, to affirm otherwise.

[6] G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, (San Francisco: Ignatius), 1994), 193.

[7] Ibid.

[8] G.K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1936), 27, emphasis added.

[9] His comments in *The Superstition of Divorce* illustrate this with typical wit: "Thus, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, an intelligent man in other matters, says that there is only a 'theological' opposition to divorce, and that it is entirely founded on 'certain texts' in the Bible about marriages. This is exactly as if he said that a belief in the brotherhood of men was only founded on certain texts in the Bible, about all men being the children of Adam and Eve. *Millions of peasants and plain people all over the world assume marriage to be static, without having ever clapped eyes on any text*. Numbers of more modern people, especially after the recent experiments in America, think divorce is a social disease, without having ever bothered about any text. It may be maintained that even in these, or in any one, the idea of marriage is ultimately mystical; and the same may be maintained about the idea of brotherhood." (*The Superstition of Divorce*, 230-1, emphasis added) In *What's Wrong with the World*, 154, he says, "I must submit to those very narrow intellectual limits which the absence of theology always imposes." He mentions this occasionally, as in *What's Wrong with the World*, 113: "This book must avoid religion, but there must (I say) be many, religious and irreligious, who will concede that this power of answering many purposes was sort of strength which should not wholly die out of our lives."

[10] "To draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook." Available from < http://www.dur.ac.uk/martin.ward/gkc/books/The_Defendant.html#A_DEFENCE_OF_NONSENSE> , *16; Internet. Accessed March 31, 2006.*

[11] *The Superstition of Divorce* in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, Vol. 4, edited by George J. Marlin, Richard P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 280.

[12] *Heretics/Orthodoxy*, 275.

[13] *Eugenics and Other Evils* in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, Vol. 4, edited by George J. Marlin, Richard P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 412.

[14] G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 53.

[15] Ibid., 54-5.

[16] This conclusion follows from Chesterton's idea that the family as a trinity reflects the divine Trinity. If this fundamental characteristic of God's nature is seen in the very form of the family, then members of the family are participating, in some fashion, in the nature of God. I am aware of the theological problems with calling family "trinity." However, we can at least allow that much of what we understand about Trinitarian inter-relatedness—union and diversity held in proper balance—can, or should be, said of the real nature of families.

[17] Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, (New York: Sheed & Ward 1943), 109.

[18] In this cryptic and sacramental comment, Chesterton recognizes at once the distinction of the sexes and the simple fact that the distinction is so strong that only God could adequately join them. The quote is from *Two Stubborn Pieces of Iron* in *G.K. Chesterton, The Common Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950), 141-3.

[19] G.K. Chesterton, *The Common Man*, (New York: Sheed and Ward), 1950, 141-143.

[20] Ibid., 441.

[21] Alvaro de Silva, *Brave New Family*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 171, quoted from *G.K.'s Weekly*, 9-27-1930.

[22] Quoted in: John Witte, Jr. "The Meanings of Marriage." *First Things* 126 (Oct. 2002) 30-41, 34.

[23] *The Superstition of Divorce*, 267.

[24] *Divorce vs. Democracy* in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, Vol. 4, ed. by George J. Marlin, Richard P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 423.

[25] Charles Williams, *He Came Down from Heaven* and *The Forgiveness of Sins*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1950), 196.

[26] *Brave New Family*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 18.

[27] *Eugenics and Other Evils*, 338.

[28] *The Superstition of Divorce*, 278.

[29] *Ibid.*, 274.

[30] Ibid.

[31] From *The Sentimentalism of Divorce* in *Fancies vs. Fads*, quoted in *Brave New Family*, pg. 135. Chesterton is saying, I believe, that allowing remarriage puts marriage and divorce on equal metaphysical footing, thus according infidelity level status with fidelity. He is defining fidelity simply as keeping one's vows. If they can be broken and then remade with another partner, does the making have any real ontological status? If so, how is it undone? Legally? This seems to devolve marriage itself to a legal construct pushing to the conclusion that marriage and divorce have equal ontological status. They can both be done or

undone at will; they are subject to the will of the persons. They have no reality outside of the persons. This cheapens marriage and makes one wonder why it is sought after, which returns the issue to its central place.

[32] *The Superstition of Divorce*, 236.

[33] *Ibid.*, 278.

[34] These additional lines from *The Superstition of Divorce*, 278-9 add clarity: "To put it roughly, we are prepared in some cases to listen to the man who complains of having a wife. But we are not prepared to listen at such length, to the same man when he comes back and complains that he has not got a wife. Now in practice at this moment the great mass of the complaints are precisely of this kind. The reformers insist particularly on the pathos of a man's position when he has obtained a separation without a divorce. Their most tragic figure is that of the man who is already free of all those ills he had, and is only asking to be allowed to fly to others that he knows not of."

[35] Ibid., 274.

[36] Ibid., 275.

[37] Ibid., 276.

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# Chesterton's Enjoyable Asceticism

Robert Moore-Jumonville

I grew up as a hearty hedonistic pagan. In my particular pagan culture, the point of existence as I recall was to indulge in as much of life's pleasure as possible, never mind the hangovers or possible consequences. If there is a deity, I thought, he created all of these earthly delights and so he must want us to enjoy them. God must be a god of celebration—a friend of Pan and Bacchus, someone who throws parties for prodigals. Then, when I accepted the Christian faith during college, I went through a typical Augustine-like struggle to tame my passions, so that I could will with the full force of my will, move past the brink of indecision, and "spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites" (Rom13:14).[1] And yet I have always hesitated to fully endorse Christian asceticism, that is, the denial of worldly goods or pleasures for the benefit of the soul. Maybe my hesitancy was partly fueled by interaction early in my Christian life with a denomination that stressed personal holiness and separation from the world. I intuitively recoiled from the threat of Gnosticism.[2] But I was equally aware of the destructive side of human passions. To be honest, I've always tended to be an addictive-compulsive type.

This burning existential dilemma of how to relate to the world's delights burst into a blaze for me a few years ago as I began to simultaneously read the Desert Fathers and G.K. Chesterton.[3] The Desert Fathers counseled me to flee from the world; Chesterton told me to embrace the world madly. Drink deeply of life, he advised: "seek to remind [yourself], by every electric shock to the intellect, that [you are] still a man alive . . . ."[4] I had read enough of Chesterton to know that he detested the teetotaler's doctrine. But what about self-restraint, I mused? After all, our culture is hardly prodigal in self-discipline. Might not Chesterton's doctrine of joy and celebration end in excessive self-indulgence for many today—even to the point of self-destruction? So what role should asceticism play in the life and thought of Christians?

As these thoughts coursed through my head, I happened to be on my way to a spiritual retreat and I was listening to ***Orthodoxy*** on tape. This is what I heard:

> A man loves Nature in the morning for her innocence and amiability, and at nightfall, if he is loving her still, it is for her darkness and cruelty. He washes at dawn in clear water as did the Wise Man of the Stoics, yet, somehow at the dark end of the day, he is bathing in hot bull's blood, as did Julian the Apostate. The mere pursuit of health always leads to something unhealthy. Physical nature must not be made the direct object of obedience; it must be enjoyed, not worshipped.[5]

I had grown up thinking that the mere pursuit of health always led to something happy, if not healthy. To obey passion was to find satisfaction. But Chesterton was describing how the flame of passion without limits and unguarded always blazed into a destructive conflagration. And again Chesterton suggested:

> I had found this hole in the world: the fact that one must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it; somehow one must love the world without being worldly.[6]

So, here was the question: how to enjoy the world without turning it into an idol, how to embrace it thankfully without loving it inordinately. Chesterton seemed to be agreeing with me that over-indulgence is a potential problem. Of Swinburne he cautioned, "The restraints of Christians saddened him simply because he was more hedonist than a healthy man should be."[7] Evidently joy and pleasure could be taken too far. Chesterton had witnessed how pleasure could be abused by the aesthetes of his day.[8]

The solution posed in ***Orthodoxy*** intrigued me. First, Chesterton argued for balance, for equilibrium. As he pointed out, a person can be mad and eat too much or be mad and eat too little. Either extreme is equally insane. But his case for balance, for Aristotle's μεσον, was in no way a bland balance. He spoke instead of a collision between two apparent opposites, a joining of two furious forces in which the ferocity of each would remain.[9]

Although Chesterton does not apply this notion of energetic balance directly to the case of asceticism, it is easy to make the jump for him. The church, he would say, has believed both feverishly in fasting and furiously in feasting. Yet this perfect balance was not epitomized in any single individual; rather, it "was often distributed over the whole body of Christendom." One person might be fasting while another was feasting. "St. Francis in praising all good, could be a more shouting optimist than Walt Whitman. St. Jerome, in denouncing all evil, could paint the world blacker than Schopenhauer. Both passions were free because both were kept in their place."[10] Within the church, in other words, there is a place for enjoyment of God's good gifts, but to preserve that enjoyment, to ensure that it does not devolve into a kind of pollution of the soul, limits must be tended. "The proper form of thanks" that is due God "is some form of humility and restraint: we should thank God for beer and Burgundy by not drinking too much of them."[11]

So, since I was unwilling to give up the world's delights, I tried the feasting and fasting routine for a while, the Chestertonian notion of balance, without finding this completely satisfactory. I would have to wait until Chesterton gave me another variation of this feast /fast model in his biography of St. Francis. In Francis, I would discover the fast become feast. This is what I so wanted to learn. So let us now explore Chesterton's beautiful rendition of the Franciscan feasting fast.

I need to declare from the start that I do not like beets. Let's just say they are not an item I would choose at a buffet; but there I was, eating and enjoying a red beet as if it were a juicy steak. Somewhere in that slice of beet (and somewhere in the whole experience of the meal) lay the key to asceticism for which I'd been searching. I should mention that by temperament I am an aesthete, a person drawn to the enjoyment of life's finest experiences. Perhaps I am not an extreme aesthete, like Soren Kierkegaard's "A" in ***Either/Or***, though, in fact, Kierkegaard correctly identified the painful dilemma for any committed aesthete: as one pursues the life of meaning through pleasure, sensation, and beauty an increasing danger looms that one will languish in boredom and despair. The pleasure is never enough to please. Kierkegaard cites the emperor Nero as a example. Nero had all the means and resources available any human needed to pursue pleasure, yet he increasingly became discontentedly sated. A law of diminishing returns kicks in for the extreme aesthete so that more and more stimulation is required to produce the same pleasure (I won't recount the merits here of "A's" rotation method of cultivating pleasure). So Nero stands as one extreme.[12]

The rigorous ascetic represents the opposite extreme. Having read a little of *The Life of St. Antony* and the desert fathers, I recalled the pain they so freely rushed to embrace. Antony kept vigil "to such an extent that he often continued the whole night without sleep . . . He ate once a day . . . . His food was bread and salt, his drink, water only . . . . For the most part he lay upon the bare ground."[13] I don't know about you, but that sounds like college dorm life to me. I'm getting too old for those kinds of spiritual heroics. Yet who is so deaf that he or she cannot hear an appealing simplicity in this ascetic call.

But there must be some balance, I thought, between these two extremes of aestheticism and asceticism. To merely denounce the world's goods and pleasures for the sake of rigor seemed a Gnostic renunciation of God's good gifts. Author Kathleen Norris looks at asceticism more positively. In her book ***Dakota***, she describes her move from New York City to North Dakota as "entering into a kind of literary desert." She suddenly found herself in monastic conditions. But listen to how she interprets her situation:

> I had stumbled onto a basic truth of asceticism: that it is not necessarily a denigration of the body, though it has often been misapplied for that purpose. Rather, it is a way of surrendering to reduced circumstances in a manner that enhances the whole person. It is a radial way of knowing exactly who, what, and where you are, in defiance of those powerful forces in society—alcohol, drugs, television, shopping malls, motels—that aim to make us forget.[14]

That sounded good to me when I read it. A little well placed self-discipline might not only do me good, I might actually be able to enjoy the fruits of it as I was doing it. Enjoyable asceticism—what a concept!

Essentially, the reason I became a vegetarian for three years was to practice self-control. It happened this way. A friend of mine was speaking to a group of Christians.[15] In his address he told us that as a group we Christians fare no better statistically than the rest of the culture when it comes to issues of morals and ethics (for instance, when it comes to divorce).[16] He then added this explanation: we are so poor at practicing self-control in most areas of our lives that when it comes to a subject about which we do care (fidelity in marriage), we are so out of practice that we fall flat on our pious faces. In conclusion, he cried out: "So go out there and find some way to develop self-control!" Now, I love meat. "If I gave up eating meat," I thought, "it would

remind me of limits and boundaries in life." I thought Chesterton would approve of my logic, since my vegetarianism was not based on some sentimental notion that animals should not be killed. As long as animals aren't tortured, I believe meat should be eaten (preferably humans eating animals instead of the other way around).

I arrived at the retreat center, *The Hermitage* in Three Rivers, Michigan, just in time for dinner. What I did not remember was that the meals were to be eaten in silence. I felt unusually adventurous as I examined the variety of dishes on the counter. I took a little of everything. Normally, I scarf my food (even though my nine-year old daughter often reminds me not to). But since scarfing in front of eight other people who can hear every slurp and dribble is embarrassing, I began to eat slowly. I think Taize music was playing that ushered us all into a meditative state as we ate. The taste of each bite and the combinations of tastes were mystically multiplied by a thousand. Was it because all the food was fresh from the Hermitage garden, prepared with care and prayer? Was it because I was eating more slowly? I am not sure I know why, but in any case, it was delicious. The meal was Babette's feast. And the best part was the red beets!

Normally, I would have been ready to go back for seconds and thirds, (and this meal was worthy of at least thirds). But I realized early in the meal that it would be a sacrilege to do so, like asking for a handful of wafers at communion. Indeed, the Spirit had transformed the meal into something sacramental. The meal was somehow perfectly balanced, aesthetically and gastronomically. Piling up my plate would turn the feast into a commodity.

The dinner became a kind of confirmation of my decision to give up eating meat. What I had discovered was an inch of what Chesterton insisted St. Francis had found. Like a reckless lover, Francis gave to God all he could give him, he sacrificed all he had, he gave his very self, out of love and gratitude—and with joy. Francis did it out of love, and what he got back was love. I had given up meat, but gotten back beets in a way that seemed to me at the time more miraculous than if the table water had been turned into wine. The whole meal glowed with an eternal confirmation that I had made the right choice. I had given up one thing, but received the whole world back again in brighter hues and with deeper meaning. I had given up flesh but received back in return joy in all food. As Chesterton says regarding Francis: "There is no way a man can earn a star or deserve a sunset." In his *Autobiography*, G.K. declares: "I asked through what incarnations or prenatal purgatories I must have passed, to earn the reward of looking at a dandelion."[17] In giving up we gain. That is the message of Lent. Because only then are we truly thankful when the feast of Easter comes. If you want to learn gratitude for having two legs, try limping around for a few weeks on one (with the other in a cast), winks Chesterton.[18]

What Chesterton helped me see is that asceticism need not be negative. Asceticism can be enjoyable. For Francis it certainly was.

> It was as positive as a passion; it had all the air of being as positive as a pleasure. He devoured fasting as a man devours food. He plunged after poverty as men have dug madly for gold. And it is precisely the positive and passionate quality of this part of his personality that is a challenge to the modern mind in the whole problem of the pursuit of pleasure.[19]

Here was a way to love the world without being in the world and without having the world suck you into its delusions of happiness. St. Francis, in the end, beats the pagan hedonists at their own game. As Alexander Men, the Russian martyr put it:

> At a certain level, [St. Francis] rejected the world; but at a higher level, he adopted it like another person. He loved nature, people, animals, grass, water, as no pagan was ever able to do: 'My sister the moon, my brother the sun.' This is something completely different than the gods of Antiquity. He accomplished a certain 'dialectical turn-around': having left the world so as to return and sanctify it by his love and his faith.[20]

Bon Appetit!

**Notes**

[1] Augustine. ***Confessions***, in Richard Foster, ***Devotional Classics.*** San Francisco: HarperSanfrancisco, 1993:55

[2] There are of course a variety of forms of Gnosticism, some more and some less legitimate. The early Christian heretic Marcion, who certainly exhibited Gnostic tendencies, insisted the body "was a stinking dungeon." Simon Stylites, though his orthodoxy was never impugned, spent 30 years atop a pillar—hardly behavior considered affirming of bodily material existence. The Gospel of John itself incorporates Gnostic notions.

[3] See Thomas Merton, ***Wisdom of the Desert***. New York: New Directions, 1960; ***The Sayings of the Desert Fathers***, trans. Benedicta Ward. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1984.

[4] G.K. Chesterton, ***Manalive***. New York: John Lane, 1912: 298.

[5] G.K. Chesterton, ***Orthodoxy***. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995: 82.

[6] ***Orthodoxy***: 84
[7] ***Orthodoxy***: 97
[8] See G.K. Chesterton, *The Diabolist*, in ***Tremendous Trifles*** (London: Metheun, 1927), where an acquaintance of Chesterton's willingly admitted, "Only what you call evil I call good" (231). Of course, Oscar Wilde was the chief emblem of decadence for Chesterton's generation.
[9] ***Orthodoxy***: 98-101
[10] ***Orthodoxy***: 102
[11] ***Orthodoxy***: 70
[12] Soren Kiekegaard. ***Either/Or.*** Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971: 19-42, 281-96.
[13] Athanasius. ***The Life of Anthony and the letter to Marcellinus.*** Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980: 36.
[14] Kathleen Norris, ***Dakota: A Spiritual Geography***. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993: 23.
[15] In fact, it was a chapel address at Taylor University by Jim Spiegel.
[16] One might profitably compare the thrust of this argument with Ron Sider's recent book, ***The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience***. This is "the scandal": after reading Sider's book, one is tempted to insist there is no Evangelical conscience.
[17] G. K Chesterton, ***The Autobiography***. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988: 321.
[18] G.K. Chesterton, *The Advantage of Having One Leg*, in ***Tremendous Trifles***. London: Metheun, 1927: 37-42.
[19] G.K. Chesterton***, St. Francis of Assisi***. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939: 96.
[20] Yves Hamant, ***Alexander Men***. Torrance: Oakwood Publications, 1995: 139.

# The Quest for Pity and Mercy in Tolkien's Middle Earth

Woody Wendling

As a lover of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, I would like to muse briefly on the books' theme of pity and mercy, in particular that shown by Bilbo and Frodo. I will start with several selected quotations from the books, then speculate on Tolkien's sources, and conclude with Tolkien's "sermon illustrations" of pity and mercy.

**Selected Quotations**

We each have our beloved Tolkien passages. My favorite one-liner in *The Hobbit* occurs just as Gollum has lost the Ring: "Thief, thief, thief! Baggins! We hates it, we hates it, we hates it for ever!" I wish to focus on the passage that immediately precedes Gollum's lament:

> "Bilbo almost stopped breathing, and went stiff himself. He was desperate. He must get away, out of this terrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts passed in a flash of a second. He trembled. And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped."[1]

Gollum has lost his prey, Bilbo Baggins, and his precious, the Ring, but little does he know that he almost lost his life. Bilbo's first instinct was to stab and kill Gollum, or at the very least to blind him. But then, "A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart." Bilbo's pity stayed his hand, and prevented him from killing Gollum when he had the chance.

I was surprised to discover that today's version of *The Hobbit*, the prologue to the "tribal bible," is the "revised standard version." This passage on pity was not in the original (1937) edition of *The Hobbit*. Tolkien substantially rewrote the "Riddles in the Dark" chapter, to emphasize Gollum's wretchedness and Bilbo's pity, as he was writing *The Lord of the Rings*.[2] He sent his new version of the chapter to his publisher, Allen & Unwin, as "a specimen of rewriting" which he had not necessarily intended for publication.[3] Tolkien was taken by surprise when the new version of the chapter found its way into the publisher's page proofs for the second (1951) edition of *The Hobbit*. This rewritten version is the one we have today.

Early on in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in the second chapter of the book, Tolkien stresses this theme of pity and mercy in a conversation between Frodo and Gandalf. Incidentally, this conversation was set much later in the movie, after entering the mines of Moria:

> Frodo: ". . . What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!"
>
> Gandalf: "Pity? It was pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity."

> Frodo: "I am sorry. But I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum. . . . he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death."
>
> Gandalf: "Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not the least."[4]

Author Ralph C. Wood considers this speech to be "the moral and religious center of the entire epic," "its animating theme."[5] He notes that this passage, "The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many," is "the only declaration to be repeated in all three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings.*"[5] In this chapter we also discover that Gollum was shown mercy not only by Bilbo, but by others in the intervening years. The author Fleming Rutledge observes the "conspicuous Mercy shown to Gollum even before the saga begins, starting with Bilbo, then continuing with Aragorn and the Wood-elves and then Frodo (instructed by Gandalf), then Faramir, and finally in the last hour even Sam, who refrained from killing Gollum on the brink of Doom. This Mercy (Pity) is the theme that is highlighted by Tolkien perhaps most of all."[6]

When Frodo gets his first chance to kill Gollum, in their face-to-face encounter in *The Two Towers*, he begins to feel pity: "Poor wretch! He has done us no harm."[7] Gandalf's previous words on pity and mercy come back to Frodo's mind as "voices out of the past," so that Frodo is merciful toward Gollum. When Frodo gets another chance to have Gollum killed, in "The Forbidden Pool" chapter of *The Two Towers*, pity again intervenes. Frodo stays Faramir's hand:

> Faramir: "What have you to say now, Frodo? Why should we spare?"
>
> Frodo: "The creature is wretched and hungry, and unaware of his danger. And Gandalf, your Mithrandir, he would have bidden you not to slay him for that reason, and for others." [8]

As regards pity and mercy, Gollum is the exact opposite of Frodo. His ownership of the ring begins with a total lack of pity. He murders his own brother, Deagol, to possess the ring. He leads Frodo and Sam into Mordor via Shelob's lair, in the hope that she will kill them and he will repossess "his Precious." Just outside Shelob's lair on the stairs of Cirith Ungol, Gollum almost repents and shows pity toward Frodo. In this scene, Gollum returns to find Frodo and Sam sound asleep:

> "Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee—but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing."
>
> But at that touch Frodo stirred and cried out softly in his sleep, and immediately Sam was wide awake. The first thing he saw was Gollum—'pawing at master,' as he thought.
>
> 'Hey you!' he said roughly. 'What are you up to?'
>
> 'Nothing, nothing,' said Gollum softly. 'Nice master!'
>
> 'I daresay,' said Sam. 'But where have you been to—sneaking off and sneaking back, you old villain?'
>
> Gollum withdrew himself, and a green glint flickered under his heavy lids. Almost spider-like he looked now, crouched back on his bent limbs, with his protruding eyes. The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall . . ."[9]

Sam's thoughtless response to Gollum was for Tolkien perhaps the most tragic moment in *The Lord of the Rings.* According to one of Tolkien's letters, Sam "plainly did not fully understand Frodo's motives or his distress in the incident of the Forbidden Pool. If he had understood better what was going on between Frodo and Gollum, things might have turned out differently in the end. For me perhaps the most tragic moment in the Tale comes . . . when Sam fails to note the complete change in Gollum's tone and aspect. 'Nothing, nothing,' said Gollum softly. 'Nice master!' His repentance is blighted and all Frodo's pity is (in a sense) wasted. Shelob's lair became inevitable."[10]

Frodo and Sam have one last chance to kill Gollum, on Mount Doom at the end of the quest. Both would have been justified in killing Gollum, after the evil he did to them in Shelob's lair, yet both spare him. At this point Frodo is "untouchable now by pity,"[11] and it is Sam who reaches "the point of pity at last . . . but for the good of Gollum too late."[12] Sam finally has the chance to deal with Gollum, but:

> "Sam's hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's twisted mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief in life ever again . . ."[13]

Frodo is the champion of pity and mercy in *The Lord of the Rings*, showing these virtues up to the end of the trilogy. In "The Scouring of the Shire," he has the chance to kill Sharkey (Saruman). Like Gollum, Saruman is worthy of death for all the evil he has caused, yet Frodo intends to spare his life: "But I would not have him slain. It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing. Go, Saruman, by the speediest way!"[14]

Tolkien emphasizes in his letters that pity and mercy were essential to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*: "It is the pity of Bilbo and later Frodo that ultimately allows the Quest to be achieved . . ."[15] Frodo "(and the Cause) were saved—by Mercy: by the supreme value and efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury."[16] "The 'salvation' of the world and Frodo's own 'salvation' is achieved by his previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury."[17] Because Frodo was consistently merciful, always sparing Gollum, he receives mercy and is spared at the moment of his final temptation at the Crack of Doom. At the very end Frodo fails in his quest to destroy the Ring, and Gollum becomes the means of Frodo's salvation. Tolkien would describe this event as a *Eucatastrophe*,[18] a "good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn'" representing a "miraculous grace, never to be counted on to recur."[19] Two other synonyms for Tolkien's *Eucatastrophe* might be what C.S. Lewis described as "a severe mercy"[20] and another Inkling, Charles Williams, described as "a terrible good."[21]

**Speculations on Tolkien's Sources**

I would like to pose the question, "Where did Tolkien come up with these virtues of Pity and Mercy, so embodied by Bilbo and Frodo?" What were his sources? Perhaps I pose this question at my peril. A professor at my undergraduate school once quipped: "Creativity is the art of covering up your sources."[22] C.S. Lewis "generally disliked source criticism, the interpretive approach that assumes major characters and images in a story can usually be traced to something in an author's life or reading habits. For one thing, he [C.S. Lewis] found that such guesses, however plausible, were often wide of the mark."[23] Tolkien also objected to the:

> ". . . contemporary trend in criticism, with its excessive interest in the details of the lives of authors and artists. They only distract attention an author's works (if the works are in fact worthy of attention), and end, as one now often sees, in becoming the main interest. But only one's guardian Angel, or indeed God Himself, could unravel the real relationship between personal facts and an author's works. Not the author himself (though he knows more than any investigator), and certainly not the so-called 'psychologists.'"[24]

"Much of the saga, as Tolkien himself says, 'wrote itself'—a phenomenon acknowledged by many writers of fiction, but especially emphasized by Tolkien in his letters because he believed that God was the Writer of the Story."[25]

Another major difficulty in trying to guess at Tolkien's sources is that pity and mercy are recurrent themes in all of the great religions and in great literature. Tolkien was strongly influenced by Anglo-Saxon literature, Germanic and Norse mythologies, Finnish mythology, the Bible, and Greek mythology.[26] Tolkien wrote in 1938 that *The Hobbit* was "derived from (previously digested) epic, mythology, and fairy-story . . . Beowulf is among my most valued sources; though it was not conspicuously present to the mind in the process of writing . . ."[27] Tolkien had specialist knowledge of Anglo-Saxon (Old English) and Old Norse, the literature of which includes the theme of mercy. In *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis chose quotations from Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse, as well as many other sources, to illustrate the universal law of the *Tao*, "The Law of Mercy."[28]

> "They said that he had been the mildest and gentlest of the kings of the world." (Anglo-Saxon. Praise of the hero in *Beowulf*, 3180)

> "There, Thor, you got disgrace, when you beat women." (Old Norse. Harbarthsljoth 38)

Perhaps it is only a coincidence, but the central kingdom of the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy was called

Mercia.[29] The name Mercia, or Mierce, is Old English for "boundary folk." [29] How ironic that the theme of Mercy is at the heart of *The Lord of the Rings*, just as Mercia was at the heart of the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy. Tolkien did consider himself to be of "Mercian" ancestry.[30]

Greek mythology is another source to be reckoned with. Tolkien "was brought up in the Classics, and first discovered the sensation of literary pleasure in Homer."[31] The purpose of Greek tragedy was to arouse a *catharsis* of pity and fear.[32] The Episcopal priest Fleming Rutledge comments on Tolkien's "tragic sensibility":

> ". . . *The Lord of the Rings* is not a tragedy; but 'pity and terror' are at the heart of it, and it lifts up our hearts through tears at the end . . . [The] outworking of Tolkien's saga is mingled with heartbreak. Yet 'it may lift up your hearts'—and this itself is surely an echo of the *Sursum Corda*, which Tolkien, as a Roman Catholic, would have heard in the Mass all his life: 'Lift up your hearts! We lift them up unto the Lord!'"[33]

Tolkien's Christian faith must surely be considered as a source for his theme of Pity and Mercy in Middle Earth. Tolkien gives important clues in his letters: ". . . I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic."[34] "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision."[35] But in a seeming contradiction, Tolkien later denied that his Christianity was a conscious schema as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien insisted that he "didn't deliberately try to insert Christian meaning into his work—a point over which he disagreed with C.S. Lewis, in whose fantasy he felt the Christianity too explicit."[36] "The [Christian] meaning, in fact, is implicit rather than explicit. It is incarnate in the whole world of the story."[35] Fleming Rutledge astutely notes that even if Tolkien was not consciously aware of his biblical and liturgical references, "he was so steeped in the Scriptures, the Christian tradition, and the liturgy that these influences suffuse the work at almost every point."[37]

*The Holy Bible* is replete with narratives about pity and mercy. The very character of God is mercy.[38] "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." (Psalm 103:8,13). Three Old Testament characters that come to mind are Jonah, Hosea, and David. The book of Jonah shows God's great mercy on Jonah in the sea, on repentant Ninevah, on the prophet again in his self-pity, and even on brute animals. Tolkien translated this book in *The Jerusalem Bible*, published in 1966.[39] The book of Hosea also acts out God's mercy; God promises to have mercy on Hosea's daughter named "Without Mercy" (Hosea 1:5 and 2:23, Douay-Rheims). A pastor once described the story of Hosea as "The Second Greatest Story in the Bible."[40] David covered up his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah, and then "had no pity" (2 Samuel 12:6). The psalms contain many passages about our need for God's mercy, including David's Psalm 51: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity." Or Psalm 136:1 (KJV): "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." Every verse in Psalm 136 ends with the chorus, "for his mercy endureth for ever."

The theme of mercy appears again and again in the New Testament, in Jesus's sermons, stories, and in his encounters with sinners and the sick. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the "neighbor" was the one that showed mercy (Luke 10:25-37). The plea of the publican, or tax collector, was "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The cry of the blind beggar, repeated twice, was "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 18:38-39). These last two pleas have now been incorporated into the popular Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."[41] In the Catholic rosary, there is a variation on the Jesus Prayer called the Fatima Prayer: "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins; save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those who have most need of thy mercy."[42] Stratford Caldecott observes that in *The Lord of the Rings*, "Each of the four main heroes undergoes a kind of death and rebirth as part of their quest, a descent into the underworld".[43] The Fatima prayer could apply to each character—Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, and Aragorn. Each character is, in a sense, saved "from the fires of hell."

**"Sermon Illustrations" of Pity and Mercy**

I would like to conclude with what I have called Tolkien's "sermon illustrations" of pity and mercy. As a disclaimer, I must point out that Tolkien's purpose was certainly not to teach Christian theology or to preach a sermon.[44] It was very important to Tolkien that there should be no explicit reference to God or Christian doctrine in his epic tale.[45] "He deliberately veiled the theological and doctrinal matters that were important to him, seeking among other things to replicate the ostensibly pagan atmosphere of the Northern sagas that he so loved."[46] There is indeed a Christian message in *The Lord of the Rings*, but Tolkien disguised it thoroughly. As Tolkien put it, "The religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism."[47]

With this disclaimer in mind, at heart Bilbo and Frodo reflect Tolkien's Catholic Christian understanding of the principles of mercy, as put forth in *The Holy Bible*: (1) We need mercy ourselves. (2) We

don't deserve mercy, but God is merciful towards us anyway. (3) We need to be merciful to others.

We really need mercy ourselves, as did David in the Old Testament (Psalm 51) and the tax collector and the blind beggar in the New Testament (Luke 18:13,38). I wonder if Tolkien had the cry of the blind man in Luke 18:38, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," in mind in the favorite passage I quoted at the start of the talk. Bilbo was tempted to put Gollum's eyes out, to "blind" him.

We're all wretched like Gollum and don't deserve mercy. Tolkien often uses the word "wretched" to describe Gollum. Again, I wonder if he had *The Holy Bible*, particularly Revelation 3:17, in mind: "Because thou sayest: I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing: and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The second half of this verse sounds so much like a description of Gollum! "Wretched" is a term that a biblically informed Christian would use to describe a sinful person in need of God's grace (cf. Paul's description of himself in Romans 7:24, "O wretched man that I am!"). Despite the fact that we human beings are wretched and don't deserve mercy, God chooses to pity us and to show us mercy anyway (Exodus 34:5,7, Psalm 103:8, James 5:11).

Accordingly, we need to be merciful toward others (Matthew 5:7, Luke 10:25-37). Our receiving mercy is to an extent contingent on our showing mercy toward others: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (the 5th Beatitude, Matthew 5:7). God forgives us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us (the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:2). Bilbo and Frodo prove to be archetypes of the biblical Good Samaritan (Luke 10:36-37): "Who proved to be a neighbor? The one who showed him *mercy*."

## Notes

[1] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*, Revised and expanded edition annotated by Douglas A. Anderson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 2002. pp. 133-134.

[2] Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981, p. 141.

[3] *The Annotated Hobbit*, p. 128.

[4] J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Fellowship of the Ring," Part 1 of *The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002, p. 58-59.

[5] Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, p. 150.

[6] Fleming Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle Earth*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004, p. 340.

[7] J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Two Towers," Part 2 of *The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002, p. 618.

[8] "The Two Towers," p. 693.

[9] "The Two Towers," p. 722.

[10] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pp. 329-330.

[11] J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Return of the King," Part 3 of *The Lord of the Rings*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002, p. 954.

[12] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 330.

[13] "The Return of the King," p. 955.

[14] "The Return of the King," p. 1031.

[15] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 191.

[16] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 251-2.

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[18] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984, p. 153.

[19] Joseph Pearce, *Tolkien: Man and Myth*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1998, p. 104.

[20] Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977, p. 210.

[21] Charles Williams, *Descent Into Hell*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1937, p. 19.

[22] Ronald Long, lecture at Messiah College, c. 1972. (I am not aware of Professor Long's source for this quotation.)

[23] David C. Downing, *Into the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles*, San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005, p. 32.

[24] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 288.

[25] *The Battle for Middle Earth*, p. 198.

[26] "J.R.R. Tolkien," entry in Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tolkien

[27] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 31.

[28] C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947, pp. 115-116.

[29] "Mercia," entry in Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercia

[30] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 108.

[31] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 172.

[32] Aristotle, *Poetics*, in Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992, p. 49.

[33] *The Battle for Middle Earth*, p. 82.

[34] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 288.

[35] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 172.

[36] Colin Duriez, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Handbook*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992, p. 60-61.

[37] *The Battle for Middle Earth*, p. 11.

[38] *The Gospel According to Tolkien*, p.149.

[39] *The Jerusalem Bible*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966.

[40] James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets, Two Volumes Complete in One Edition*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, p. 13.

[41] Brother Ramon and Simon Barrington-Ward, *Praying the Jesus Prayer Together*, Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2001. (Simon Barrington Ward was C.S. Lewis's chaplain at Cambridge.)

[42] Richard Gribble, *The History and Devotion of the Rosary*, Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1992.

[43] Stratford Caldecott, *Tolkien, Lewis and Christian Myth*, unpublished manuscript, p. 8. (Quoted from *Tolkien: Man and Myth*, p. 116.)

[44] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 414.

[45] *The Battle for Middle Earth*, p. 8.

[46] *The Battle for Middle Earth*, p. 192.

# What Has Aslan to do With Tash?
# C.S. Lewis and Natural Theology

Christina Hitchcock

In *The Last Battle*, Lewis tells the story of the end of Narnia. This beautiful world comes to a close as the children and animals watch from inside the stable door. The stable, like so many things in Narnia, is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. The children are finally discovering Aslan's own true country. But they are not the only ones to discover this country. Also within the stable is Emeth, a Calormene, who has spent his life worshiping the demon-like god of the Calormene's—Tash. Emeth is as surprised as the children at his inclusion in this new world. In response to their questioning he describes his encounter with Aslan,

> The Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine, but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. Then . . . I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, Lord is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one? The Lion growed so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him, for I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore, if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him . . . . But I also said (for the truth constrained me), Yes I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me, thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.[1]

Here we have in fictional form what Lewis had long contemplated and spoken of in other places—the possibility of true knowledge of ultimate reality through natural or human sources. The character of Emeth may offer some insight into Lewis's understanding of what he calls "myth" and what many theologians call "natural theology."

To properly understand the story of Emeth (as well as the *Chronicles of Narnia* as a whole) we must first understand Lewis's distinction between allegory and symbol. Lewis proffers definitions in a 1939 essay, "'In Allegory the images stand for concepts (giant Despair, Mr. Legality); in Symbolism for something the poet has experienced but which he has not reduced, perhaps cannot reduce, to a concept.'" Indeed, the difference is in the specificity. Lewis goes on to say, "'Allegory can always be translated back into the concepts: the "meaning" of a symbolical work cannot be stated in conceptual language because it is too concrete.'"[2] While allegories have a one-to-one correspondence that can be expressed through a single concept, symbols are much richer and point towards the "more real invisible world."[3] The *Narnia Chronicles* have often been read as allegory, but Lewis repeatedly stated that they did not fit into this category. The more proper category for the *Chronicles* as a whole is symbol. As symbol, these stories leave our world not for a world of fiction *per se*, but for a world Lewis considered more real than our own. Symbol does not stand for a concept, but rather tells an entire story. To use Lewis's own language, Narnia is a re-symbolizing of the world revealed in Christianity. If symbol is the proper category for the *Chronicles* as a whole, we can assume that this is also the proper category for Emeth and his story. As such, we must ask what story or meaning Lewis is symbolizing in Emeth.

Lewis believed that symbol was most fully embodied in what he called Myth. Myth, for Lewis, is the archetypal stories that strike deep into the roots of our imagination and give meaning to our lives. Myth taps into that deep longing that all people have but cannot always understand. He writes, "Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are

all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise."[4]

Myth, for Lewis, has multiple characteristics. First, it allows the hearer to experience truth on a deeper level than just the intellect. Myth reaches the imagination, which is the organ of meaning, rather than the intellect, which is the organ of fact. Myth embodies a universal reality and therefore acts as a bridge between absolute reality and our own realm of abstract truth. Myth is more than factual and symbolizes something that cannot be reduced to a mere concept. Because of this, myth always has an element of the fantastic, which is always in reference to the supernatural which the myth embodies. Therefore, Lewis believes that myths fulfill God's purpose by reflecting brokenly the true light. Lewis called myth "a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination."[5]

It is here that we begin to see his connection to natural theology. Natural theology claims that humans can have some knowledge of God through the natural, created world, including innate human capacity. Lewis's understanding of epistemology grew out of his understanding of humans as both rational and imaginative, and he believed that these two faculties could lead humans to an understanding of God. This is done through myth, which touches the imagination, as understood through reason. Lewis believed that non-Christian myths and the Christian myth are all pointing to the same true God, though the pagan myths are "dim dreams or premonitions of that same event [redemption]."[6] We can see this in the conversation Edmund and Lucy have with Aslan at the end of their journey on the *Dawn Treader*. They are told that they will never return to Narnia, and when Lucy cries out in despair that it is not Narnia they will miss, but Aslan himself, Aslan replies that it is time they knew him in their own world. "'Are—are you there too, Sir?' said Edmund. 'I am,' said Aslan. 'But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.'"[7] Here Lewis puts in Aslan's mouth his own beliefs about the purpose of Myth. A myth of any kind is meant to be our first stepping-stone in knowing the great I AM. A myth will help us to recognize the true name when we encounter it in our own world. Myth is the first small step in knowing the true Lord and paves the way for all other steps that must necessarily come after it.

Lewis contends that the "mythology" of the Jewish people as recorded in the Old Testament is simply one myth among many. In *The Pilgrim's Regress* Lewis developed the idea of "the Shepherd People" to whom God has revealed himself through the Law. Lewis contrasts this with the revelation given to pagans, stating, "The Landlord has circulated other things besides the Rules . . . . What use are the Rules to people who cannot read?"[8] Lewis equates the myths of pagan societies to the Law given to the people of Israel, claiming that both serve the same function—to lead God's people to Christ. As Richard Cunningham explains, "Mythological structures are inherent in the nature of reality, structures tied not to certain words but to certain patterns of events that impress themselves on human imagination . . . . Myth is one of the means by which God reveals himself to mankind. Lewis believes that God is revealing himself in many ways and in many places."[9] This revelation is exemplified by Lewis when he states that the pagan myth of that the Corn-King is a portrait of Christ. In *Miracles* Lewis writes, "The similarity [between Christ and the Corn-King] is not at all unreal or accidental. For the Corn-King is derived (through human imagination) from the facts of Nature, and the facts of Nature from her Creator: the Death and Re-birth pattern is in her because it was first in Him."[10] Lewis does admit that because Israel was the chosen people theirs was the chosen mythology, but no other distinctions are made between the Law and the myths of pagan cultures. Both seem to have the same goal and the same ability to reach that goal.

Following this theme, Lewis describes Christianity as "the myth that came true." For Lewis myth and truth are usually two separate realities. Truth is the realm of fact while myth is the realm of meaning. The myths of pagan cultures and of ancient Israel are truthful in the sense that they convey true existential significance, not in the sense that they are historically based. However, many things that are grounded in history and fact are devoid of this significance, in and of themselves. According to Lewis, it is in Christ that myth and truth come together. The meaning of the ancient myths is grounded and made alive in a real person who lived in real time and real history. In Christ there is a new kind of re-mythologizing of all the old myths, with the drastic newness of truth attached to the myth. Yet, as Richard Cunningham asserts, there is, for Lewis, no absolute newness in Christ:

> There can be progress in the insights within the framework of Natural Law, *which is the sole source of all value judgments*, but only quacks and cranks introduce new moralities. Even Christ did not teach a radical new morality. The Golden Rule is only a summing up of what people had always known to be right . . . . Moral rules . . . are expressions in terms of temporal existence of what God by his own righteous nature necessarily is. For that reason Lewis could never think of God or the Christian life as "beyond morality." God may be more than more; he is not less nor other than moral.[11]

Cunningham is right to see morality at the foundation of Lewis's understanding of myth. *Mere Christianity* opens with an extended discussion of the moral

argument for God's existence, showing Lewis's belief that the basic tenet of the universe which points to God is, in fact, morality. Therefore, even Christ himself must acknowledge and simply teach this universal truth.

Here is where we begin to see the problems in Lewis's understanding of Myth as revelation. To invoke theologian Karl Barth, one must draw a sharp line between "religion" and revelation. Barth defines revelation as God coming to man and religion as man's search for meaning. Superficially this sounds very similar to Lewis. However, Barth goes to further define religion as "the realm of man's attempts to justify and sanctify himself before a capricious and arbitrary picture of God."[12] This "capricious and arbitrary picture of God" is what Lewis calls "the unfocused gleam of divine light." Like Lewis, Barth recognizes that when comparing God's revelation with human things "revelation seems necessarily to be only a particular instance of the universal which is called religion."[13] Barth acknowledges that human culture and human thinking seem always to be related to some belief or knowledge of the supernatural, of something other than ourselves. But while granting this, Barth responds with the following statement, "But the question arises how the statement has to be interpreted and applied. Does it mean that what we think we know of the nature and incidence of religion must serve as a norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God; or *vice versa*, does it mean that we have to interpret the Christian religion and all other religions by what we are told by God's revelation?"[14] Barth believed that the great representatives of modern Protestantism were declaring the former ("the revelation of religion") rather than the latter ("the religion of revelation").[15] Here we see Lewis standing with modern Protestantism in his belief that Myth precedes Christ and helps us understand and know Christ.

But Barth says something much more is required. It is only in Christ that we encounter the true God and so it is only in Christ that we receive real revelation—a true encounter with the true God. Commenting on Barth's understanding of revelation, David Mueller writes, "We are forbidden, therefore, if we wish to speak of the triune God of the Bible, to begin with some general doctrine of God or of ultimate being abstracted from God the Father who makes himself known in his Son and through his Spirit."[16] It is this abstraction of meaning from the person of Jesus Christ which Lewis is guilty of. In putting the myth before Christ, Lewis is claiming that there is a universal truth that can be understood in a variety of ways and that can be "mythologized" within many human cultures. This is possible because the meaning of the myth is universal, in the sense that it is embedded within the universe and is therefore available to humans who exist within that universe. However, this leads to a separation between God and the meaning of God, as if God's self-meaning is something he simply possesses or expounds upon rather than is. Lewis's understanding of myth does not lead us to talk about God, but rather about ourselves. If, like Lewis, we can only speak of revelation *after* we have spoken of religion, "What we are really and properly speaking about is not revelation, but what precedes it, man and his religion, about which we think that we know so much already which we are not ready to give up. There lies our love, there our interest, there our zeal, there our obedience, there our consolation: and where we have our consolation, there we have our God."[17]

Barth recognizes that these modern Protestant theologians did not set out to talk about themselves and their idols, but he questions whether any other outcome is possible. The same can be said for Lewis. We can state with certainty that Lewis wants to talk about the true God rather than about himself. However, given his understanding of myth it is perhaps impossible for him to do what he has set out to do. Mark Freshwater, in his analysis of Lewis, demonstrates that Lewis has abstracted truth from Christ in such a way that there is no longer a living or vital connection between the two. In other words, Jesus is no longer THE truth, but simply the best expression of the truth because he joins truth with meaning in a way that other myths do not. Freshwater follows this abstraction to its logical end: "Lewis stressed the mythic nature of Christianity as a validation of the historical reality. However, in his *Narnia Chronicles* Lewis showed that the Christian story has a mythic power that is independent of the historical reality. Thus, both Lewis and Bultmann recognized the *kerygma* and radical obedience to it as the essence of Christianity."[18] Again, Freshwater writes, "Lewis showed in the *Narnia Chronicles* that the realities of the Gospel can be transposed into a fictional world like Narnia without distorting or distracting from the Christian message. The *Narnia Chronicles* succeed as religious fantasy because the truth of the 'myth' they present *is prior to and independent of* any historical judgments or findings."[19] To be fair to Lewis, he would most certainly disagree with this interpretation of his work. But to be fair to Freshwater, we must acknowledge that his statements are a genuine result of Lewis's thinking. Lewis does see myth arising prior to and independent of historical judgments or findings. Lewis insists that myths are related to God (they are imbedded in the created world by its Creator), but that is not enough. To separate truth and meaning from the very person of Christ is to fall into the trap of natural theology—the idea that man can know and understand God apart from God himself. Christ no longer is the truth, he is simply one way of accessing the truth. This makes Christ simply one Buddha among many. Lewis himself, when pushed, could not but follow his ideas to this same conclusion. In *God in the Dock* Lewis wrote, "Even assuming (which I most constantly deny) that the doctrines of historic Christianity are merely mythical, it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in

the whole concern."[20] With this statement Lewis makes, even against his own protests, Christ superfluous to knowing God. Lewis essentially wants to have his cake and eat it too. He wants to find in humans the potential and ability for knowledge of God and yet still ultimately attribute this knowledge to God. Barth states clearly that this we cannot do.

> We could not fix the reality of revelation in God, and yet find in man a possibility for it. We could not ascribe the event to God, and yet attribute to man the instrument and point of contact for it. We could not regard divine grace as the particular feature and man's suitability and capacity as the universal. We could not interpret God as the substance and man as the form. We could not, therefore, regard the event of revelation as interplay between God and man, between nature and grace.[21]

This belief in the interplay between God and man, nature and grace, always leads to unbelief because it abandons the Church's faith in the gospel and God's grace. "The reason for this is not that the believer has the knowledge of God, whereas the unbeliever does not. No one *has* the knowledge of God. Rather, the impossibility of natural theology reflects human beings' radical dependence on God's grace—a condition in which both believers and unbelievers find themselves."[22] If we abandon the truth of this radical dependence we do not, as Lewis hoped, lead the unbeliever further along the path to God. In fact, the opposite is true because we state our independence from the God and Lord of the universe who has been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Even Lewis, in distinction from so much of his own writing, states, "It must be admitted at once that Christianity makes no concession to this point of view [natural theology]. It does not tell of a human search for God at all, but of something done by God for, to, and about Man."[23] This statement, taken with Lewis's strong support of natural theology, reveals the very real danger Barth is concerned with. When human knowledge of God centered in the self is made equal with God's self-revelation centered in Christ, humans feel free to judge between the two, to pick and choose what seems best. Inevitably we will choose poorly.

Which leads us back to Emeth. Because Narnia and its inhabitants are not allegories, we cannot put Emeth in a one-to-one correspondence with the righteous pagan or natural theology. Emeth must be seen as living within a mythic structure and therefore as symbolizing something more than a single concept. I believe that in Emeth Lewis is symbolizing the mystery of salvation. However, the category into which Lewis places that mystery makes all the difference. If he is placing the mystery of Emeth's salvation in the realm of piety and good works, then, as we have already seen, it is a form of natural theology. It is making something other than God himself the norm, the principle that is true within and throughout the universe and which even God himself must obey and respect, both in himself and in others. If piety is the norm, then God is not. If God is not the norm, he is no longer God.

However, if Lewis is placing the mystery of Emeth's salvation in the realm of God's grace, we are confronted with an entirely different symbol. If Emeth is there in spite of his worship of Tash, in spite his admission that "the name of Aslan was hateful to me,"[24] then Emeth's story is a mythologizing of the truth attested to in revelation—our knowledge of God and therefore our salvation are entirely and at all times dependent on God and God alone. We are saved by God's grace and that salvation is every moment upheld by God's grace. If Emeth's salvation is *in spite* of his good works, then his story actually speaks against natural theology.

Given the text, I am forced to conclude that Emeth is a symbol of Lewis's capitulation to natural theology. Aslan specifically says that it is for Emeth's works of piety and "purity of desire" that Aslan receives them and him as his own.

Where does this leave us, and where does it leave Lewis and the *Chronicles of Narnia*? Lewis's primary mistake is one of priorities. The myth comes before Christ. But if we allow Christ to come before the myth, we can have a new and robust appreciation of Narnia. In Narnia, Lewis re-mythologizes Christianity. This is very different than Christ re-mythologizing the pagan myths. When Christ comes first, we can have a new understanding of nature and man. Therefore David can write, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."[25] David knew God first and therefore had a right understanding of nature. Lewis knew Christ and then wrote about Narnia. For those who already know Aslan "in this world," Narnia can help us know him better. And conversely, for those of us who know him here, we can recognize him in Narnia as well.

**Notes**

[1] C.S. Lewis. *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 164-165.

[2] Richard B. Cunningham. *C.S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 73.

[3] Ibid, 73.

[4] C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 135.

[5] C.S. Lewis. *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 218.

[6] C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 129.

[7] C.S. Lewis. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 247.
[8] C.S. Lewis. *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 146.
[9] Cunningham, 95-96.
[10] 186.
[11] Cunningham, 118-119. Emphasis mine.
[12] Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Vol. I.2. Translated by G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 280.
[13] Ibid, 281.
[14] Ibid, 284.
[15] Ibid, 284.
[16] David Mueller. *Karl Barth* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1972), 64.
[17] Barth, 296.
[18] Mark Edwards Freshwater. *C.S. Lewis and the Truth of Myth* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1988), 123-124.
[19] Ibid, 127. Emphasis mine.
[20] C.S. Lewis. *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), 64.
[21] Barth, 280.
[22] Joseph L. Mangina. *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 61-62.
[23] *Miracles*, 187.
[24] *The Last Battle*, 162.
[25] Psalm 19:1

# From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis

Douglas Beyer

The Apostle Paul told the Philippians, "Of his own free will [Christ] gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness" (Philippians 2:7). The word he used for giving up all he had was ἐκένωσεν, "emptied." To become a man required that the Son of God empty himself of the glory he enjoyed from eternity with the Father in heaven. In doing this he opened the way for men and women to be transformed into creatures fit for heaven. The word the Orthodox Church has long used for this transformation is Θεὸσις, a word that suggests that we become gods.

Though all biblical scholars agree that *kenosis* means that Christ gave up something, they disagree over what it was he gave up. Some argue that he gave up his divinity so that during the days of his incarnation he was merely human. Others contend that Jesus retained his divine nature and attributes (Matthew 1:23; Romans 1:4) and added them the attributes of our human nature becoming completely human and divine in one person.

The story of our redemption goes from *kenosis* to *theosis*. Other terms with similar meaning have been used for this process: terms such as *deification*, or *divinization*, but in this paper I will use the classical language of Eastern Orthodoxy. According to this teaching, through Christ's redemption people become holy, united with God as completely as it is possible for created beings to do so.

It might appear presumptuous to write about C.S. Lewis's views of a word he never used. But not using the word doesn't mean he didn't address the subject. Avoiding the technical language of theology, Lewis anticipates our glorious future in glowing figures of speech which covey the meaning of *theosis* better than the word itself.

**Theosis in the writings of C.S. Lewis**

Lewis brings to this subject not only his gifts of imagination and reason, but also his humble perspective. Unlike many advocates of contemporary culture, Lewis focuses attention not on his own status, but on the destiny of others. "It may be possible," he writes, "for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken." This has practical consequences in the way we live with one another. "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be *strongly tempted to worship*, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare." (*The Weight of Glory*) (Italics added)

Lewis succinctly states the movement from *kenosis* to *theosis*: "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." (*Mere Christianity*) In the same book he goes further to say:

> The command *Be ye perfect* is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were "gods" and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller

> scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.

Being *perfect* is mistakenly taken by some to suggest a fixed state of changelessness. They suppose that any so-called process of improvement necessarily implies a deficiency in a supposed original state of perfection. On the other hand, just as a perfect bud can become a perfect flower and then a perfect fruit, so by the grace of God we will grow from one stage of perfection to another throughout eternity. God is going to make us perfect someday if it kills us!

Lewis warns us that the process of perfection is not painless—either in this life or the next. Setting aside Lewis's view of purgatory, we note his agonizing complaint following the death of his wife:

> Sometimes, Lord, one is tempted to say that if you wanted us to behave like the lilies of the field you might have given us an organization more like theirs. But that, I suppose, is just your grand experiment. Or no; not an experiment, for you have no need to find things out. Rather your grand enterprise. To make an organism which is also a spirit; to make that terrible oxymoron, a 'spiritual animal.' To take a poor primate, a beast with nerve-endings all over it, a creature with a stomach that wants to be filled, a breeding animal that wants its mate, and say, 'Now get on with it. Become a god.' (*A Grief Observed)*

Many years before Lewis wrote that, he anticipated the excruciating pain of deification. At the end of *Pilgrim's Regress* John sings:

> *'That we, though small, may quiver with fire's same*
> *Substantial form as Thou—nor reflect merely,*
> *As lunar angel, back to thee, cold flame.*
> *Gods we are, Thou has said: and we pay dearly.'*

In his essay, *Man or Rabbit,* Lewis sees this as the painful end of a life of moral struggle.

> Morality is indispensable: but the Divine Life, which gives itself to us and which calls us to be gods, intends for us something in which morality will be swallowed up. We are to be re-made. All the rabbit in us is to disappear—the worried, conscientious, ethical rabbit as well as the cowardly and sensual rabbit. We shall bleed and squeal as the handfuls of fur come out; and then, surprisingly, we shall find underneath it all a thing we have never yet imagined: a real Man, an ageless god, a son of God, strong, radiant, wise, beautiful, and drenched in joy.

The process of becoming a god does not mean we become less human. (N.B. in his *kenosis* Jesus Christ did not become less divine, only more human.) Indeed instead of becoming less human, in *theosis* we become more human by having our humanity fulfilled. In his sermon on *Transposition* Lewis said,

> And we must mean by that the fulfilling, precisely, of our humanity; not our transformation into angels nor our absorption into Deity. For though we shall be "as the angels" and made "like unto" our Master, I think this means "like with the likeness proper to men": as different instruments that play the same air but each in its own fashion. How far the life of the risen man will be sensory, we do not know. But I surmise that it will differ from the sensory life we know here, not as emptiness differs from water or water from wine but as a flower differs from a bulb or a cathedral from an architect's drawing.

Lewis's view of *theosis* is held in context with his strong Trinitarian theology. When Peter, Edmund and Lucy are brought through death into Narnia they *meet* Aslan; they don't *become* Aslan. This Trinitarian context is important. Without it, the effort to put oneself in the place of God becomes the root of all sin and false religion. In fact, it is Satan's own sin and the spirit of antichrist (*anti*, "instead of" Christ). "Ye shall be as gods" was and is still Satan's beguiling temptation (Genesis 3:5).

Screwtape knows this when he says that God "wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct." (*The Screwtape Letters, with Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 38.) He considers souls food to be consumed. In a letter to Dom Bede Griffiths, 27-9-48 he wrote: "I fully agree with your remarks about India. I even feel that the kind of union (with God) wh. they are seeking is precisely the opposite to that which He really intends for us. We all once existed potentially in Him and in that sense were not other than He. And even now inorganic matter has a sort of unity with Him that we lack. To what end was creation except to separate us in order that we may be reunited to Him in that unity of love wh. is utterly different from mere numerical unity and indeed presupposes that lover & beloved be distinct[1]?"

Christian Science teaches a non-Trinitarian form of *theosis*, but Lewis takes issue with its simplistic view

of pain and evil. In a letter to Mrs. Edward Auen, 1 Nov. 1954 he wrote:

> Christian Scientists seem to me to be altogether too simple. Granted that all the evils are illusions, still, the existence of that illusion wd. be a real evil and presumably a real evil permitted by God. That brings us back to exactly the same point as we began from. We have gained nothing by the theory. We are still faced with the great mystery, not explained, but coloured, transmuted, all through the Cross. Faith, not wild over-simplifications, is what will help, don't you think? Is it so v. difficult to believe that the travail of all creation which God Himself descended to share, at its most intense, may be necessary in the process of turning finite creatures (with free wills) into—well, into Gods.

Note: the capitalization of "Gods" is a form Lewis normally avoids when referring to our theotic destiny, but perhaps it was something he did in the informality of a casual letter.

The doctrine of *theosis* has been criticized by some as a self-improvement program on steroids. Lewis wrote to Clyde Kilby 20 January 1959 to answer the objection of Cornelius Van Til.

> As to Professor Van Til's point it is certainly scriptural to say that 'to as many as believed He gave power to become the sons of God,' and the statement 'God became Man that men might become gods' is Patristic. Of course Van Til's wording 'that man must seek to ascend in the scale of life' with its suggestions (a) that we could do this by our own efforts, (b) that the difference between God and Man is a difference of position on a 'scale of life' like the difference between a (biologically) 'higher' and a (biologically) 'lower' creature, is wholly foreign to my thought.

Van Til's words appear to be his attempt to rephrase Lewis's thoughts on *theosis*—a rephrasing that Lewis rejects as implying something "utterly foreign" to his thinking. Whatever *theosis* means to Lewis, it is certainly not humanistic self-improvement.

Lewis grounds his view of *theosis* in the doctrine of incarnation (*kenosis*). In this he follows the tradition of Augustine who called Christ "the one who, already Son of God, came to become Son of man, so as to give us who were already sons of men the power to become sons of God" (*Letter* 140). Though Christ's *kenosis* is the grounds of our *theosis*, Lewis points to the resurrection as its proof.

> Christ has risen, and so we shall rise. St Peter for a few seconds walked on the water; and the day will come when there will be a re-made universe, infinitely obedient to the will of glorified and obedient men, when we can do all things, when we shall be those gods that we are described as being in Scripture. (*The Grand Miracle*)

Lewis develops his understanding of *theosis* by differentiating two terms for life. The Greek words βίος and ζωη suggest two different kinds of life. Lewis sees *Bios* as the natural life we receive by natural birth. *Zoe,* on the other hand, is the spiritual life we receive by spiritual rebirth. "... what man, in his natural condition, has not got," he wrote, "is Spiritual life—the higher and different sort of life that exists in God. We use the same word *life* for both: but if you thought that both must therefore be the same sort of thing, that would be like thinking that the 'greatness' of space and the 'greatness' of God were the same sort of greatness." (*Mere Christianity*)

*Bios* "comes to us through Nature, and ... (like everything else in Nature) is always tending to run down and decay so that it can only be kept up by incessant subsidies from Nature in the form of air, water, food." That contrasts with *Zoe* which "is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole natural universe." They are, of course alike in some ways. "*Bios* has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance to *Zoe*: but only the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or a statue and a man. A man who changed from having *Bios* to having *Zoe* would have gone through as big a change as a statue which changed from being a carved stone to being a real man." This process Lewis pictures in the penultimate chapter of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when statues come to life.

Both *Zoe* and *Bios* come to us from God, but in different ways. Calling to mind the distinction expressed in the Nicene Creed that Christ was "begotten not made," Lewis says,

> We are not begotten by God, we are only made by Him: in our natural state we are not sons of God, only (so to speak) statues. We have not got *Zoe* or spiritual life: only *Bios* or biological life which is presently going to run down and die. Now the whole offer which Christianity makes is this: that we can, if we let God have His way, come to share in the life

> of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was begotten, not made, which always has existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has—by what I call "good infection." Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else. (*Mere Christianity*)

The presence of *Zoe* in the life of a Christian is seen in the common act of prayer.

> God is the thing to which he is praying—the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers. The man is being caught up into the higher kind of life—what I called *Zoe* or spiritual life: he is being pulled into God, by God, while still remaining himself. (*Mere Christianity*)

Whether the transformation of a human from *Bios* to *Zoe* is called conversion or *theosis*, it is certainly more than mere self-improvement.

> . . . mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a *degree we cannot yet imagine*. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. (*Mere Christianity,* italics added)

The biblical words translated "eternal life" are literally "life of (the) age," ζωὴ αἰώνιός (Matthew 19:29; John 3:16; 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:27, 40, 47; Acts 13:46; Rom. 6:22). The ancient Hebrews conceived of all history as divided between two ages: this age and the age to come (Matthew 12:32; Ephesians 1:21; Luke 18:28-30). They hoped to enjoy here and now in this age some of the quality of life which they will eventually have in the age to come (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 17:3). Eternal life was not something they had to die to get; they could receive it here and now (Luke 10:25; John 3:36).

**Theosis in the Bible**

Eastern Orthodoxy, C.S. Lewis and Classical Protestantism look to the Bible for their understanding of theology. Any reflection on *theosis* must be seen in the light of holy scripture. Though the hrossa on Malacandra might not understand the full nature of evil, they could discern that it was a bent good. Beginning with something good, Satan bends it to deceive Eve telling her, "God knows that in the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened, and *you shall be as gods*, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5, italic added). The sin of Adam and Eve was not that they could become as God was, for they had already been made in His image and likeness. The temptation, and subsequent fall from grace, was to become as God *without* God—to take his place, usurp his position, set up on their own without further need of him.

Paul explains that Satan "beguiled" Eve (2 Corinthians 11:3). The word *beguiled* means enchanted, mesmerized, charmed, seduced. *Theosis* has a demonic counterfeit. Our sin is described by Lewis in Augustinian terms as "spoiled goodness."

The poet Asaph deals with this counterfeit in Psalm 82.

> God presides in the heavenly council; in the assembly of the gods he gives his decision: "You must stop judging unjustly; you must no longer be partial to the wicked! Defend the rights of the poor and the orphans; be fair to the needy and the helpless. Rescue them from the power of evil people. How ignorant you are! How stupid! You are completely corrupt, and justice has disappeared from the world. 'You are gods,' I said; 'all of you are children of the Most High.' But you will die like mortals; your life will end like that of any prince."

The key phrase in this psalm is verse 6 in which God says to corrupt judges, "you are gods." That אלהים does not refer to the Everlasting God Himself, is made clear by the dictum: "you will die like mortals." The psalm opens with the statement that "God (אלהים) presides in the heavenly council; in the assembly of the gods (אלהים). Although the same word, *elohim,* is used for both the Most High God and those whom he judges, there is an obvious difference. Earthly judges are given

this title to affirm their divinely ordained responsibility and the seriousness of their failure. They are *elohim* by the grace of God ("*I said* you are gods" was the heavenly declaration.). But if their practice is not an Amen to their name, they will be divested of the glory that could have been theirs.

In his argument with those who disputed his deity Jesus appeals to this psalm. "It is written in your own Law that God said, 'You are gods.' We know that what the scripture says is true forever; and God called those people gods, the people to whom his message was given. As for me, the Father chose me and sent me into the world. How, then, can you say that I blaspheme because I said that I am the Son of God?" (John 10:34-36) Jesus's argument is *a minori ad majus*—from the lesser to the greater. If they were gods to whom God's message was given and who failed so miserably to live up to this honor, how much more am I?

Paul refers to Satan, as "the god of this age" (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος, 2 Corinthians 4:4). He is an imitation god in the same sense that men and women can be imitation gods. Satan was the first one to promise godhood back in the Garden of Eden. His devious route to *theosis* led to death and eternal separation from God.

The doctrine of *theosis* proclaims that the culmination of Christian life is not only influenced by Christ's commands and example but also transformed by his grace. "Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind" (Romans 12:2). It might be less shocking to consider this transformation a purely moral one: that our goal of "godness" means merely "goodness" or "godliness," in the moral sense. It certainly is all of that, but scriptural language suggests much more—a union with God that transforms us to the extent that we become by the grace of God, like Jesus Christ, both human and divine. John declares the moral implications of this. "Those who are children of God do not continue to sin, for God's very nature (σπέρμα) is in them; and because God is their Father, they cannot continue to sin" (1 John 3:9).

We do not achieve this *theosis* by human effort, but by being made to conform to Christ by the new nature given to us as believers. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature (καινὴ κτίσις): the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Though theotic change is not a human achievement, it does call for intense and even painful effort. "My dear children!" Paul said, "Once again, just like a mother in childbirth, I feel the same kind of pain for you until Christ's nature is formed (μορφωθῇ) in you" (Galatians 4:19 GNB). A "born again" Christian is morphed into a new self. "So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to—the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, and you must put on the new self, which is created (κτισθέντα) in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy" (Ephesians 4:22-25 GNB).

Our progressive sanctification is not something done for us by God from the outside, by God's acting upon our minds and wills from his throne in heaven, nor is it something we do from below as we pray to God above and seek to obey his commandments on earth. Rather it is the very life and energy of God in us. We are becoming increasingly like God because we are participating more and more in his divine nature. As Christians, our bodies are in very truth temples of the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Paul tells the Colossians "you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). This mirrors his own experience: "I have been put to death with Christ on his cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:19-20). Furthermore, he exhorts all of us to "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). "For in Christ all the fullness (πλήρωμα) of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness (πεπληρωμένοι) in Christ" (Colossians 2:9-10). We may spend the rest of eternity discovering the full extent of this fullness, but it boggles imagination that what the incarnate Christ possessed we have also been given.

Those who take the words of Jesus in John 6 literally may see further evidence for *Theosis*. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them to life on the last day. For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. The living Father sent me, and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me" (John 6: 54-57). If folk wisdom and nutritional science is correct ("You are what you eat.") then in some sense those who take communion become Christ—not, of course, the second person of the Holy Trinity, but something divinely supernatural. Peter said, "He has given us the very great and precious gifts he promised, so that by means of these gifts you may escape from the destructive lust that is in the world, and may *come to share the divine nature*" (γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως). (2 Peter 1:4)

In Ephesians Paul argues that marriage is more than a union. It is a reunion. "As the scripture says, 'For

this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one'" (Ephesians 5:31). Paul is quoting part of a familiar Old Testament passage (Genesis 2:23-24). "For this reason . . . " refers back to Eve's creation from Adam's rib. Adam's unity which was divided in the creation of Eve was restored in marriage.

Then Paul gives theotic implications of this: "There is a deep secret truth revealed in this scripture, which I understand as applying to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). Just as marriage is not only a union, but a reunion, so salvation is not just a union, but a reunion. Mankind's original unity with God was broken by sin, but restored through Christ. Through his atonement ("at-one-ment") on Calvary, Christ recovered that which belongs to him and is a part of him. Just as Eve was derived from the body of Adam, so the church is derived from Christ. And just as Eve was reunited to Adam in marriage, so the church is reunited to Christ in baptism.

That is our glorious destiny: "The Spirit and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, sharing his sufferings so as to share his glory" (Romans 8:15-17). Note that we shall share *his* glory! Not the dazzling glory of the sun, but the far greater glory of the Son! "All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness (εἰκόνα) in an ever greater degree of glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Our future glory is unimaginable. Paraphrasing Isaiah 64:4, Paul says, "What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!" (1 Corinthians 2:9) Not even the phenomenal mind of C.S. Lewis. Someday you and I will become greater than the greatest angels in the heavenly hosts—we'll be like Jesus! John writes: "My dear friends, we are now God's children, but *it is not yet clear what we shall become.*" What we shall *become* has already begun in what we *are*. The climactic conclusion of that process is something we do not know fully now. But that we don't know everything, doesn't mean we know nothing. " . . . we know that when Christ appears, *we shall be like him*" (1 John 3:2 GNB). We are on our way to unimaginable glory. Paul describes that transformation in these words: "We shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God: we shall become mature men reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature" (Ephesians 4:13). That's our glorious destiny from *kenosis* to *theosis*.

*God's written Word unfolds the plan*
*Of man made god by God made Man.*
(paraphrased from a half-remembered poem)

## Notes

[1] *The Collected letters of C.S. Lewis*, Volume II, Edited by Walter Hooper, HarperSanFrancisco, 2004, page 880.

# Till We Have Voice: C.S. Lewis and the Possibilities of Creative Nonfiction

William Duffy

"Lewis talked as he wrote and wrote as he talked," said Dr. Emrys Jones, who studied under C.S. Lewis at Oxford. At the fifth triennial C.S. Lewis conference at Oxford during the summer of 2002, Dr. Jones recalled his unique relationship with Lewis during an afternoon discussion session, "He helped you say better what you wanted to say." During his time at Oxford, Lewis was a renowned lecturer, but as a private tutor, Lewis exhibited the makings of a teacher who "never lectured" as Jones put it, but instead dialogued with his students in an effort to see how they were developing as thinkers and writers. In short, he engaged his students and instilled in them an understanding that education isn't about the passive reception of knowledge, but that it is instead about growing one's capacity to create knowledge through critical thought and personal introspection.

This winter's release of Hollywood's version of Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* evidenced one more ripple, or perhaps in this case a wave, of the imaginative productivity that Lewis's work has been inspiring for almost half a century since his death. While the blockbuster success of the film is going to inspire an entire new audience to learn about the man behind Narnia, Lewis's reputation within certain literary and religious circles has been relatively sound for a number of decades. With that said, the critical and biographical works that have been written about Lewis are almost too numerous to count; this last year alone saw the dizzying publication of enough books about Lewis and Narnia to make the part-time Lewis scholar like myself question whether we haven't plumbed the well too excessively. What more is there to say about Lewis? Can we look at the work of Lewis and see more than literary criticism, Narnia, and mere Christianity? In short, yes, I think we can.

Dr. Jones was most interested in Lewis the teacher, the person who inspired his writing and taught him to say better what he wanted to say. Notwithstanding all his other roles, Lewis was a writing instructor. Despite an ongoing explosion of interest in Lewis's work and biography, there has been little scholarship devoted to his writing about writing—mainly because Lewis scholarship has been undertaken by scholars who are chiefly interested in literature and religion rather than in the field of composition. Lewis is known for his definitive scholarly works and inspiring Christian apologetics, but his overwhelming popularity, especially within this latter field, may have overshadowed what this writer has to say about the very art of writing itself.

An important but often overlooked book, Lewis's *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* is his only published work that presents what might be some of Lewis's most profound thoughts on writing. Surprisingly, unlike the majority of his other books, *Till We Have Faces* received bad reviews and sold poorly. Lewis, however, thought it was the best writing he had ever done.[1] And so did some of his closest friends, who were very often his most challenging critics, such as Owen Barfield who said, ". . . *Till We Have Faces* was far the best thing he ever did in the sphere of imaginative literature."[2] In this retelling of the Eros and Psyche myth, Lewis uses his own imaginative supplements to present a compelling story about love and redemption that the original Greek myth doesn't tell, but what brilliantly stands out in this multifaceted work is the means through which the novel's central character, Orual, experiences her redemption and self-fulfillment—she writes a memoir. As Orual writes her story, not only does Lewis paint a vivid and restless first-person narrative, he also turns formal writing theory upside down. Instead of composing an essay, Lewis lets his ideas about writing grow out of Orual's writing, so that a unique picture depicting composition and its possibilities is created organically through the suggestive medium of story. *Till We Have Faces* is a book about writing; moreover, it is a book about the possibilities of writing, not just as a method of recording facts and history or as a means of communication, but also as an art and creative medium, as a tool of self-discovery, a venue for worship, and a

place where public and private thought interweaves into story.

**Writing the Myth**

That Lewis chose to present this story as myth offers some indication into why the subject of writing fits so nicely into the novel. Myth often eludes the riggers of time as it tells universal narratives of human experience, yet it still possesses a strong anchor in the ancient. It feels old and wise, so it has a seemingly transcendent aspect that allows it to reach out and touch the human condition regardless of circumstance. Kath Filmer suggests "By locating the action of this novel in what is obviously a pre-Christian era, Lewis distanced it from modern experience and avoided overt identification of it as a work of Christian polemic."[3] While I agree with Filmer that the story's setting distances the tale from a recognizable Christian epoch, I don't think Christian persuasion is what Lewis was aiming for through this novel, or at least not in the same way as his earlier apologetics and the Narnia chronicles. In fact, when you put Orual's act of writing her complaint against the gods into the context of the book's mythic structure, an important message is conveyed about the timelessness of writing and its possibilities. A story that can survive so long brings experience, durability, and credit. More than Christian persuasion, the novel is about personal reflection, critical doubt, and the discovery of selfhood.

I believe Peter J. Schakel comes the closet in uncovering why Lewis was so attracted to myth and why it fits so nicely as this novel's plot base, ". . . myth for Lewis, of course, meant not 'a fictitious story or unscientific account,' but a use of narrative structure and archetypal elements to convey through the imagination universal or divine truths not accessible to the intellect alone."[4] Lewis of course knew mythology, being an avid reader of Norse mythology, but that he would have Orual *write* her own story makes *Till We Have Faces* notable because never before had Lewis written anything like this before. Not only does he abandon his role as an omniscient narrator, but the character telling the story is a woman—how many of Lewis's contemporaries wrote first person, female narratives? Commenting about his retelling of the myth, Lewis says, "Nothing was further from my aim than to recapture the peculiar quality of the *Metamorphoses*—the strange compound of picaresque novel, horror, comic, mystagogue's tract, pornography, and stylistic experiment" (313)[5]. Indeed, Lewis does capture those qualities in Orual's story, yet he does so through her writing, thus showing how directly writing can instill that wonder and intrigue despite its age, history, or creator.

Throughout her story it is apparent that Orual is looking for a balance between the rational thinking of the Fox and the religious traditions of Glome. Orual admits that she wants answers—why her sister was taken from her, why her father despises her, why she's ugly, and perhaps the most important question of them all, why are the gods so hateful? But these questions neither the Fox and his reason nor the priests and their superstitions can solve for Orual, so she writes in hope of finding a way through her confusion. Having never come to terms with her past, writing her book is all Orual has left. If in the future some traveler from the "Greeklands" comes to Glome, then maybe they will understand Orual's book. She confesses, "Then he will talk of it among the Greeks where there is great freedom of speech even about the gods themselves. Perhaps their wise men will know whether my complaint is right or whether the god could have defended himself if he had made an answer" (4). Through the act of retelling the priest's incorrect story, Orual hopes to come to an understanding of her life and the direction that it has taken, and to be at peace with her past. For Orual, writing is a way of knowing and making reconciliations.

Orual's complaint against the gods is an example of one of the possibilities of writing—to make sense out of confusion. Orual desires tangible proof of either release or acceptance from the gods, nothing in between; and perhaps they will respond to her book, or at least that is what she hopes. But her writing is also an appeal, if not to the gods themselves, then to the Greeks—the people whose society is the embodiment of reason itself, yet she still cannot completely abandon her home—her history. Orual explains, "I write in Greek as my old master taught it to me . . . but I write all the names of people and places in our own language" (3-4). For the time being her comfort comes through writing. She writes what she believes is true, because what she is seeking is truth.

**Bridging the Gap**

Through the literal development of Orual's character as the story progresses, we see more of Orual's own emotional and spiritual weakness. Her shortcomings become painfully apparent as Orual herself continues to write. Upon finishing her manuscript and reading it over she becomes aware of the gap that separates her frustrated incomplete self from the fulfilled and contented Psyche. It is here in part two of *Till We Have Faces* where Lewis uses Orual to deliberately convey the power of writing. When talking about her manuscript, Orual writes, "I know so much more than I did about the woman who wrote it. What began the change was the very writing itself" (253). The previous accusatory tone that resonated throughout her manuscript in part one of the book has been replaced with a voice that speaks with recognition, surprise and urgency.

She now sees her book, her complaint against the gods, as an incomplete text. "It would be better to

rewrite it from the beginning, but I think there's no time for that . . . Since I cannot mend the book, I must add to it. To leave it as it was would be to die perjured . . ." (253). She realizes that her original intent for writing her story was to maintain a sense of control—her writing was just another projection of her self-centered outlook. What she thought would be a weapon against the gods, her written complaint, turned out to be the very instrument that helped lead to her own salvation. "The change which the writing wrought in me (and of which I did not write) was only a beginning—only to prepare me for the gods' surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound" (253-4). Writing is a way to remember and recall and make sense of experience, and these acts become means to self-discovery. Though this idea is hardly novel, the manner through which Lewis emphasizes this point is significant because it gives us a glimpse into what kind of writing influenced him not just as a writer, but also as a husband, friend and teacher.

Joe R. Christopher writes, "It seems that Lewis's choice of form was influenced by his experience of writing his autobiography, *Surprised By Joy*, published the year before *Till We Have Faces*. It had probably taught him a greater inwardness than the writing of his earlier books had."[6] In *Till We Have Faces*, like in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis isn't speaking to our minds and our intellects, as he had before in his formal works of nonfiction, instead he is speaking directly to our hearts and our sense of imagination. In short, Lewis discovers the genre of creative nonfiction through these works and explores his experience as the springboard for his imaginative writing. When we write through imagination we can discover voice, and voice is what transforms our writing from simple words on paper to powerful messages about life that transcend time and experience.

**Discovering the Story**

The biographical history of *Till We Have Faces* is rich with significance. The novel appeared the same year that Lewis married Joy Davidman, and to say that she helped influence *Till We Have Faces* would be an understatement. In fact, not only does Lewis dedicate the text to her, but one of Lewis's stepsons, Douglas Gresham, observes, "I know that the character of Orual . . . was written not only by Jack (Lewis), but also by my mother . . . and the character does contain elements of both people."[7]

But why did Lewis want to retell the Eros and Psyche myth in the first place? Lewis did admit that this particular myth had always fascinated him and that he was instantly drawn to it. In a postscript to the text Lewis explains, "The central alteration in my own version consists in making Psyche's palace invisible to normal, mortal eyes—if 'making' is not the wrong word for something which forced itself upon me, almost at my first reading of the story, as the way the thing must have been" (313). As Schakel adds, "The tale frustrated Lewis, partly because he saw that such interpretations miss the real point and vastly oversimplify the story, and partly because he saw that Apuleius missed the whole point himself."[8] Essentially, Lewis sensed that the story needed more and that its full potential had not been realized in its current form. So Lewis desired to correct the story, or if "correct" is the wrong word here, he wanted to tell a similar tale to that of Eros and Psyche, but in his story focus would be on Psyche's sister. That Lewis is creating a vivid and complex story for this previously minor character in his own retelling of the myth not only testifies to his own vision as a storyteller, but it adds importance and necessity to the very idea that writing should not diminish the stories around us, but that it should yield even more discoveries and further complexities to what we already recognize as familiar.

In the preface to *Surprised By Joy*, Lewis writes, "The story is, I fear, suffocatingly subjective; the kind of thing I have never written before and shall probably never write again."[9] But sure enough Lewis did write a similar story when he composed *Till We Have Faces*. The relationship between *Till We Have Faces* and *Surprised By Joy* is noteworthy because it gives us some idea of how Lewis was simultaneously thinking and remembering and piecing together both the story of his youth and that of Orual. Referring to *Surprised By Joy*, Lewis biographer A.N. Wilson comments, ". . . in a sense, even as he was writing it, and impishly choosing its title, which by then was charged for him with double meaning, Lewis was becoming aware that it is not so easy to tell the truth about ourselves. And it was out of that dilemma that his novel *Till We Have Faces* would grow."[10] So in one perspective, the writing of Lewis's book coincides with the writing of Orual's. The way through which Orual remembers and pushes through her past and present circumstance is similar to the way that Lewis recalls Apuluias's myth and wrestles with how to best retell the story—until both Orual and Lewis discover what is necessary to complete their respective tasks. Orual comes to know herself and discover voice, while Lewis, through his relationship with Joy and the completion of his own autobiography, finally comes to discover how to write creative nonfiction.

**Till We Have Voices**

The very writing of her complaint against the gods is what makes Orual see the true nature of her life and it is what finally gives her voice, but her written manuscript is only the material product of her writing—Orual's writing, that is, the development of her voice, has been a lifelong experience. As Lewis said himself in the preface of the first edition of *Till We Have Faces*, "This re-interpretation of an old story has lived in the

author's mind, thickening and hardening with the years, ever since he was an undergraduate. That way, he could be said *to have worked at it most of his life*. Recently, what seemed to be the right form presented itself *and themes suddenly interlocked*" (italics mine).[11] Writing is not conveyed in this story as a quick transference of thought to paper. To say that Orual could have at any point created her text is not the meaning that Lewis wants to get across. Instead, he paints a picture of the writing process in terms of learning, seeing and feeling over an extended period of time, indeed over a lifetime.

Before Orual can discover voice through writing, she has to progress through the experiences that made her writing possible. Furthermore, before she had ever written a word of her manuscript, the actual thought of writing began to play more heavily within her. Orual says, "So back to my writing. And the continual labour of mind to which it put me began to overflow into my sleep. It was a labour of shifting and sorting, separating motive from motive and both from pretext; and this same sorting went on every night in my dreams . . . " (256).

There came a point when Orual knew she was going to write, it was a time when she realized she *had* to write. And that's when her story began to come together in some form and order, but the decision to compose her manuscript came upon Orual deliberately and with great urgency, "I could never be at peace again till I had written my charge against the gods. It burned me from within. It quickened; I was with book, as a woman is with child" (247).

It had been a long road for Orual, but her story came together nonetheless and it even provided her with a new way of seeing. The implication here is found in the way we *perceive* the act of writing. Orual's description of her spiritual discovery is profound, "I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?" (294). Fittingly, how can we *really* write until we have something to say? Words that are thrown down on paper idly with hardly any feeling behind them are boring and fake. The real face of bad writing is not found in poor style and structure but in empty sentiment. When words really move a reader it is because he or she can empathize with the feelings that pushed those words to paper—and that's the key to what Lewis indirectly suggests about how we think about composition. The importance is not so much that we say things correctly and according to the proper rules, but the importance is that we have something to say that matters to us. The importance is that we *speak* through our words and not mumble; that we react and respond instead of sitting back; that we not only think about what we are saying, but we feel it as well.

In the majority of his books Lewis rationalizes and deduces, he presents his arguments and defends them. After all, Lewis was the champion of Oxford's Socratic Club, and the majority of his nonfiction works are quite forthright in manner and tone. And whether or not we choose to agree or disagree with Lewis's ideas and opinions, it would be safe to assume that most of us recognize the vigorousness within his writing. But *Till We Have Faces* is not a forceful book despite its dynamic characteristics and thrust of its meanings. However, the role of writing, specifically how writing is a means of discovery, stands out as one of the book's most significant statements. Not only do we see Lewis evolve as a writer, but we also see him bring the uniqueness of his voice in *Surprised By Joy* into the character of Orual. John Sykes adds, "Lewis here gives us a character who presents herself as author. But her most important task in the novel is to become her own best reader."[12]

With creative nonfiction we learn to become our own best reader, and we learn to write for an audience through writing for ourselves. In *Till We Have Faces* Lewis challenges how we think and talk about writing by conveying the act not as an objective tool for *persuading*, but instead conveying it as a lens for seeing and as a vehicle for *suggestion*. Lewis describes writing instead of defining it. That Lewis developed from a staunch persuader into a humble adviser shows that he had discovered more of himself and the kind of writing that really matters, and this at least partly through his creative nonfiction. Dabney Adams Hart writes, "What C.S. Lewis represents for a wide range of readers is what he said we all look for in literature: an enlargement of our own limited experience."[13] But what Lewis shows us about himself in his later works like *Till We Have Faces* and *Surprised By Joy* is that he too desires an enlargement of his own limited experience—and for us, by using his written experience, he's willing to offer his counsel along our own journeys. And for writers he especially offers us his own experience as a means of reference and suggestion. Lewis never tried to directly tell us about writing, but he lets us indirectly get a feel for it. And as a writer speaking too other writers, he does not cater to our intellects, but instead to our imaginations.

## Notes

[1] Lewis, C.S. *Letters of C.S. Lewis*. W. H. Lewis and Walter Hooper, eds. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988. p.492.

[2] Owen Barfield. *Owen Barfield on C.S. Lewis*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1989. p.7.

[3] Kath Filmer. *The Fiction of C.S. Lewis*. London: St. Martin's Press, 1993. p.39.

[4] Peter J. Schakel. *Reason and Imagination in C.S. Lewis*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984. p.5.

[5] All quotations from *TWHF* are from the Harcourt paperback edition, 1984.

[6] Joe R. Christopher. *C.S. Lewis*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987. p.121.
[7] *Ibid* p.120
[8] Schakel, p.5
[9] Lewis, C.S. *Surprised by Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955. p.viii.
[10] A.N. Wilson. *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*. New York: Norton, 1990. p.252.
[11] *Ibid* p.6
[12] John Sykes. "Till We Have Faces and the Broken-Hearted Reader" *Premise*. Vol 5, No.3, July 1998. p.17.
[13] Dabney Adams Hart. *Through the Open Door: A New Look at C.S. Lewis*. U of Alabama P, 1984. p.146.

# Always Winter?
# C.S. Lewis and Hope for the Visual Arts

Jerry L. Eisley

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,*
*Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;*
*Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,*
*In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*
*–Christina Rossetti*

What relevance do Lucy, Mr. Tumnus, and Narnia have to our post-modern world? In 1991, three days before Orthodox Christmas Eve, fifty artists and I traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia to celebrate the first official recognition of Orthodox Christmas and the changing of the name Leningrad back to St. Petersburg. As we rode through the night, Communist apartment blocks were lit only by candles because of power outages. When we arrived at our four star hotel, we were not allowed to go to the main entrance but were pointed to the service entrance and required to unload our own luggage and drag it through the hotel basement since we had not paid off the mafia who controlled the entrance and parking lot. It was a bleak introduction to the realities of Russian society.

Upon reflection I was struck by the similarity between atheistic Communist Russia and Narnia under the rule of the White Witch. "Always winter and never Christmas" is a stark description of both. I would suggest it is also an apt metaphor for the arts and their cultural influence today. The gradual loss of "Christmas," or the centrality of the Incarnation, has engendered a crisis of isolation and irrelevance in the fine arts that we can ill afford. C.S. Lewis, both by his example in and his views on creativity and community, offers hope for the visual arts.

To examine the clues that Lewis gives us about creativity and community, I would like to begin with a story about Pope John Paul II. In *John Paul the Great: Remembering a Spiritual Father*, Peggy Noonan describes the Pope's first visit to Poland while it was still under Communist rule; a visit in which "he went to Poland and changed the boundaries of the world."[1] The Pope was speaking on the vigil of the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on Christ's apostles, and he enlarged upon this theme.

> What was the greatest of the works of God? Man. Who redeemed man? Christ. Therefore, he declared, 'Christ cannot be kept out of the history of man in any part of the globe, at any longitude or latitude . . . The exclusion of Christ from the history of man is an act against man! . . . The massed crowd thundered its response: "We want God!"[2]

The Pope's clarity of vision elicited this remarkable response from the citizens of an atheist society. If C.S. Lewis were speaking to contemporary artists, I believe his message would be the same. The Incarnation of Christ redeemed and liberated the image and narrative for all time. Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15) and as such He shows representation to be holy and sanctified, a viable window to God. Therefore Christ cannot be excluded from art or art history, because His presence infuses and defines both. Though the trajectory of contemporary art has slowly eradicated transcendence of every sort in accepted artwork through its misguided search, I believe the unheard cry of artists today echoes that of the Poles:

"We want God!" Lewis speaks profoundly to that cry in several important ways.

First, Lewis demonstrates a deep connection to pagan myth while viewing Jesus's Incarnation as the fulfillment of those myths. Lewis freely integrates the myths that he loved into the very stories that point to Christ as King. In *Prince Caspian*, for instance, Aslan's mounting triumph over the Telmarines is celebrated and aided by pagan figures Bacchus and Silenus. "One was a youth, dressed only in a fawn-skin, with vine-leaves wreathed in his curly hair. His face would have been almost too pretty for a boy's, if it had not looked so extremely wild."[3] Soon there is a call for "Refreshments!" and Bacchus, the god of wine, provides divinely delicious grapes. When Susan and Lucy later realize the identity of the creatures, Susan comments, "'I wouldn't have felt safe with Bacchus and all his wild girls if we'd met them without Aslan.' 'I should think not,' said Lucy."[4] Lewis shows that pagan myths, under the rule of Aslan in Narnia and Christ in our world, enrich rather than threaten the work of Jesus.

Lewis patterns an older usage of myth that was prevalent in the Renaissance and before. Renaissance masters, including Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua and Signorelli in his chapel in the Duomo at Orvieto, also referenced pagan history. In both chapels, images of pagan myths stand near those of Biblical revelation. Signorelli portrays pagan philosophers and myth makers in *grisaille,* confined by decorative borders. In the Scrovegni Chapel, Giotto includes pagan myth on cameo vignettes flanking the large panels of the chapel's narrative. For example, to the left of the fresco of the entombment of Christ he places the Old Testament scene of Jonah and the fish along with a cameo based in pagan myth of a bear feeding her cubs in a cave. This juxtaposition of images provides a visual explanation of how Christ's entombment fulfilled those prophetic stories—both Biblical and pagan pointed toward the truth.

Early Christian artists were adept at seeing Christ as the fulfillment of all myths, as Lewis's "true myth." What Christians knew in the Renaissance is explained by Lewis when he refers to the "humiliation of the myth": "The essential meaning of all things came down from the "heaven" of myth to the "earth" of history . . . That is the humiliation of myth into fact."[5]

By utilizing pagan myth, Lewis not only illuminates the essential truth present in many human stories but also teaches a respect for artistic history. Current artists live in a very different world. Myth is dismissed as nonsense. Artists are disconnected from art history and its great symbols. This break from art history and the tyranny of the new have created an artistic myopia. The work that is created is often isolated, centered in the self or human concerns. At best, it is based on a shallow transcendence rooted in current political and social trends. Lewis's writing offers us a vision of a different approach. His example, along with that of earlier Christians, calls artists to a re-enlivened creativity that honors the past and embraces the importance of truth embedded within myth.

Secondly, Lewis draws a distinction between practicing religion and practicing the Incarnation—the Indwelling presence in our lives. There is a great trend today to have many discussions about "art and religion." Have you ever noticed that most of the reviews of "religious art" are put in the back section of the paper near the obituaries, thus rendering the art powerless? As post-modernists, we accept realities that are beyond description, but we do not attempt to bring them into a cohesive connection with life and objectivity. According to Lewis, religion is intellectualized dissection of realities (that are ultimately beyond description); the practice of which is both untrue and painful. He describes his experience of religion as a child and how he nearly drove himself mad in his misguided attempts at piety: "I had rendered my private practice of that religion a quite intolerable burden. . . . No clause of my prayer was to be allowed to pass muster unless it was accompanied by what I called a 'realization,' by which I meant a certain vividness of the imagination and the affections."[6] As Lewis illustrates, the practice of religion becomes a practice of introspection that ultimately destroys itself. It is the pursuit and presence of the Other, which Christ's Incarnation made possible for us, that allows for freedom and creation.

Contemporary artists, however, have turned inward, trying to locate a transcendence by examining the landscape of the self or stepping into a limited "other." Olafur Eliasson illustrated this desire with his *The Weather Project* at the Tate Modern a few years ago. *The Weather Project* was a large art installation of mirrors, fog, and light simulating a sunrise or sunset, suspending the viewer in the "forces of nature." It eliminated the walls, pedestals and labels of a museum; even the marketing avoided any visual representation of the installation (thereby avoiding a pre-conceived encounter with the art). Instead the ads simply posed provocative questions or observations about weather and its effect on human behavior. Lewis would be pleased.

Eliasson's work challenges the given of art commodification through advertising and hype. I admire that nobility and I think post-post-modern artists are right in this insistence. However, Eliasson's installation, which allows hardy viewers to climb up and see the mechanism that produces the fog and sun, implies that the artist with his manufactured "natural" environment is the Wizard of Oz, hiding behind a curtain. Initially he invites a view of nature as the transcendent in his artwork. With the mechanics revealed, however, even the Otherness of nature is portrayed as a ploy or trick initiated by the artist.

Lewis's message of hope lies in escaping the autonomous self with its self-conscious religious

sensibilities and moving toward the presence of God who is beyond nature and super-nature.[7] Lewis turns upside down the contemporary myth that the artist has to reinvent himself or become a high priest for society. Instead, the artist is a servant taking joy in the realities that surround him, the relationships that enrich him, and the discoveries of those who preceded him. We also see, through Lewis's interactions with the Inklings, that the creative process is not only a solitary occupation but also one forged in relationship with other artists. Lewis and the Inklings believed in an oral tradition. Visual artists have the same potential for conversation regarding a visual tradition. Through his own example, Lewis draws artists out of the self and its temptation toward introspective religion into a pursuit of the presence of God and the presence of others.

**Christmas on Earth, A Modern Alternative: Becoming the Unman**

Is it possible to have Christmas without the Incarnation? Many modernist artists have thought so. Early modernism began by denying any search for spirituality. Indeed, "The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985,"[8] published in 1986, was the first contemporary admission that modern artists explored more than just paint on canvas and actually did seek a spirituality through their artwork. These investigations led artists to a deep occult and non-material spirituality that sidestepped the Incarnation. They were only doing what artists have to do. Art always flows from worship, and artists could not live with the consequences of a purely rational, non-spiritual world. What happened with artists is similar to the development of Weston in Lewis's *Space Trilogy*.

In Lewis's story *Out of the Silent Planet*, the character Weston is originally a materialist. He, like many modernist artists, dismissed any presence of the divine as only a projection of the self. In Lewis's later story, *Perelandra*, Weston has gotten rid of his materialism. He now locates God within himself. His self-centeredness has become self-worship. He begins to explore what he calls "the Force"—pure spirit, where there is no distinction between good and evil.

In a similar way, largely unknown artist Barbara Rubin, a member of Warhol's Factory, began Weston's search. Art critic Daniel Belasco recounts in the "The Vanished Prodigy" what he considers her brilliant and all too brief career, lasting from 1963 to 1968. Rubin's 29 minute film, *Christmas on Earth*, is a record of an orgy staged in a New York City apartment. Her work, according to Belasco, "deepens our understanding of a period when artists pushed self-determined and guiltless sexuality into the public sphere to catalyze social revolution."[9]

*Christmas on Earth* is a filmed version of a search for joy that was birthed in modernism. In Rubin's words, *Christmas on Earth* is "pure experience in every way. The people in it were beautiful. Nobody censored what they themselves did or anybody else was doing."[10] Belasco quotes Rubin's words recorded by *Newsweek* art critic Jack Kroll: "When I shoot I'm just emanating feeling all over—it's like it's someone else shooting, not me."[11] Rubin's description eerily reminds me of the words of Weston: "Call it a Force. A great, inscrutable Force, pouring up into us from the dark bases of being. A Force that can choose its instruments. . . . I'm being guided."[12]

Weston's search for spirituality without Jesus leads him to interact with the occult, an experience that eventually strips him of his humanity. As Leanne Payne describes, "the rest of Weston's story is one of incarnational evil: a supernatural evil force speaking and acting through one who has lost the good of reason and of humanity. Weston has become "the Unman."[13] Or, as Rubin said of her experience, "It's backward living . . . We watch it rather than live it."[14] As Weston rejects the Incarnation of Christ, he is forced to a different kind of incarnation that destroys and defeats. Similarly, the rejection of Christ's Incarnation in art history and the fine arts leads to the pursuit of a dark incarnation of the "life force" as a desperate attempt to produce a transcendence and spirituality apart from God. Ironically, in the late 1960s Barbara Rubin experienced a dramatic personal and artistic reversal. She joined a counter-cultural Orthodox Jewish group and effectively disappeared from the art world, requesting that *Christmas on Earth* and her other works be burned.

Here again, Lewis speaks powerfully to the artistic search for meaning. His message is condensed through a brilliantly visualized scene from the new cinematic version of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lucy joins Mr. Tumnus for tea. Slowly Mr. Tumnus appears to become a genuinely creepy figure, much like a sexual predator. After serving her tea, he picks up his pipe (Lewis brilliantly casts him in the form of Pan); the camera closes in on the fireplace and the dancing flames as he plays a mesmerizing tune. The flames become dancers dancing in a circle, visually repeating Matisse's dancers. Suddenly Aslan appears roaring in the flames, extinguishing the fire and the candlelight in the room. He literally sucked the oxygen out of the room. Here the movie taps into Lewis's understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation.

To illustrate, I would like you to come with me on a visit the Holy Land; specifically Caesarea Philippi, reputedly the birthplace of Pan. Caesarea Philippi was the religious and cultural capital of Jesus's day. It was filled with temples and built around the sacred spring that served as the center of Dionysian worship. Pagan nuns (who probably looked like Matisse's dancers gone bad!) would dance themselves into a frenzy and then perform animal or human sacrifice. It is here that Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" and gave us His cultural directive: ". . . on this rock I will build My

church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."[15]

Immediately following Jesus's question and Peter's affirmation, Jesus goes to the Mount of Transfiguration. Archeologists now believe that the Transfiguration took place on the top of Mount Hermon, which towers above Caesarea Philippi in the distance. Why do Elijah and Moses appear here with Him? I believe that it is because Elijah and Moses both dealt with and overcame Baal worship: Moses by throwing down the tablets and repenting for the children of Israel, and Elijah by calling down fire on the prophets of Baal. Pan, Baal, Dionysian worship are all connected with the dark forces of occult spirituality, the landscape through which modern man, along with Weston, seeks the spiritual Other (Lewis calls it the "life force.")

As Lewis would describe, here too at Caesarea Philippi there is a deeper magic. The springs, the birthplace of Pan, were known as "the gates of hell," made reference to by Jesus. These springs are fed by the melted snows of Mount Hermon. Christ's presence ironically pours forth from the mountain where He was recognized as God to the springs of the pagan god over whom He rules. The obvious is made clear to us: Jesus is over all and the only source of our true spirituality.

The snows of Mount Hermon may be melting, but it is still winter in Narnia. During tea, Mr. Tumnus describes to Lucy his longing for the days before the reign of the Witch, such as ". . . summer when the woods were green and old Silenus on his fat donkey would come to visit them, and sometimes Bacchus himself, and then the streams would run with wine instead of water and the whole forest would give itself up to jollification for weeks on end."[16] Through Tumnus's description, Lewis, like Matisse, brilliantly describes the joy found in this life. However, instead of a limited knee-jerk reaction against the misuse of sexuality and celebration in a Bacchanalian feast, he also uses this pagan celebration to point to a truer experience of joy. Lewis gives us a clue to that joy when he speaks through Tumnus who says, "the streams would run with wine instead of water." Lewis's hand directly points us to another celebration; the wedding feast at Cana and the scene of the first miracle performed by Christ in His ministry when He turns water into wine. This miracle is a declaration of the end of winter and the Queen's robbery of joy. The wedding feast at Cana, in turn, points to the ultimate wedding feast of Christ and the Church. The humiliated myth, which became historical truth at the wedding of Cana, points to the celebration that is fulfilled beyond time.

In conclusion, Lewis is the modern seer—the bridge between the spiritual in a post-modern society and God's presence in the world. His personal struggles enable him to articulate the modern dilemma that rationalism and the idolatry of the self have not been able to solve. As we move more deeply into the post-post-modern reality, Lewis's works point us to that which most satisfies our soul. It is a place where deep spirituality meets human need. It is a place where art is empowered and is liberated back into its proper relationship with worship. Truly, "*now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer . . .* "[17]

## Notes

[1] Peggy Noonan, *John Paul the Great: Remembering a Spiritual Father* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 24.
[2] Noonan, 27.
[3] C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), 167.
[4] Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, 169.
[5] C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1976), 130-131.
[6] C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, (United States: Harvest Books, 1966), 61-62.
[7] To explore these categories, see Leanne Payne's trio of books, *The Healing Presence, Real Presence* and *Restoring the Christian Soul.*
[8] Maurice Tuckman, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985, L.A. County Museum of Art*, (New York: Abeville Press Publishers, 1986).
[9] Daniel Belasco, "The Vanished Prodigy," *Art in America*, December 2005: 61.
[10] Belasco, 64.
[11] Belasco, 65.
[12] C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1996), 92.
[13] Leanne Payne, *The Healing Presence*, (Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), 252.
[14] Belasco, 65.
[15] Matthew 16:18, New King James Version.
[16] C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 16.
[17] William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1996), p 9, lines 1-2.

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# *Signs* and C.S. Lewis: The Meaning of *Meaning* and the Value of Film

Charlie W. Starr

Lovers of C.S. Lewis frequently say his power as a fantasist and apologist is his understanding of the importance of imagination in human knowing—its emotional impact, experiential quality, intimate connection to both faith and our longing for encounters with mystery. Behind Lewis's understanding of imagination is his awareness that meaning precedes language and therefore truth. Lewis unlocks the power of art, myth, and language in realizing that meaning is *connection* and that many "meanings" are experiential, intuitive, imaginative, and semi-conscious. The implications of Lewis's theory of *meaning* on the medium of film are several and best exemplified in the last three of M. Night Shyamalan's movies, *The Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable*, and *Signs*.

**The Problem of Meaning**

Two passages in Lewis are foundational to our understanding his definition of meaning. The first of these appears in *The Last Battle*, describing the New Narnia, the heavenly one: "The new one was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can't describe it any better than that: if you ever get there you will know what I mean" (213). The most significant part of the passage is the line, "as if it meant more." But what exactly does that mean? A quality of the new Narnia which contrasts it with the old is its apparent increase in size, but this turns out not to be so much an increase in physical size as in the largeness of its being (the new Narnia looks more "like the real thing"[210]). And as being increases, so does meaning. A start perhaps, but hardly a definition.

The second significant passage occurs in "Bluspels and Flalansferes," an essay of literary theory in which Lewis considers the problem of literal versus figurative or metaphorical language:

> [I]t must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition. (*Rehabilitations* 157-58)

This paragraph, unfortunately, is more of an addendum to "Bluspels," and thus there is no sufficient context for knowing exactly what Lewis means when he says imagination is the "organ of meaning" and meaning is the "antecedent" to truth. To understand Lewis's definition of meaning and how it impacts a discussion on film requires two explorations, one in a problem of epistemology that was central to Lewis thinking, and the other a careful analysis of Lewis's theory of myth.

**The Epistemological Dilemma**

We begin with Lewis's epistemological problem: the abstract/concrete or thinking versus experiencing

dilemma. Lewis noted that, while experience allows concrete knowing that is intense and immediate but critically vague, reason allows careful contemplation that is clear, but abstract and time bound. How can reality be known with the clarity of reason but without the space of abstraction, of separation? And how can reality be experienced intensely but with a knowing that is complete? ("Myth Became Fact" 65-66). Humor exemplifies the dilemma: we can laugh at a joke or think about why it was funny. We cannot do both at the same time. Why is this a problem? Lewis's own example is of pain. He thinks to himself, 'If only my tooth would stop hurting, I could write another chapter for my book about pain. But when do we really know pain except when experiencing it in all its intensity?' Lewis says that myth is a partial solution to this problem.

Lewis makes a number of distinctions in his "Myth Became Fact" article that will facilitate our understanding. First he makes a connection between "myth" and "reality" and a separation of "reality" from "truth": "What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that *about which* truth is)"(66). Reality (or fact) is what is; truth is a proposition *about* fact. A little later in the paragraph Lewis notes that myth is not "like direct experience" and in the following paragraph he asserts that myth "comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history." Myth serves as a bridge across the chasm separating heaven from earth. Next, Lewis describes our earthly existence as a "valley of separation" (66*n*). He suggests, "Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; *in hac valle abstractionis*" (66). What is Lewis saying about reality in this metaphor? In *Mere Christianity* Lewis suggests there are different kinds of reality: the descriptive facts and the prescriptive ones (14-19). "Myth Became Fact" is here revealing kinds of interconnected realities: the reality we experience on earth, the cognitive experience of making abstract statements of truth about that reality, and the experience of a transcendent something (a higher reality, a myth-like heavenly realm) in mythic stories.

In summary, myth reveals heavenly reality not earthly experience (except once, says Lewis, in the Incarnation); truth is born of concrete myth, but truth is abstract statements *about* reality here in the fallen world of abstraction, "the valley of separation";
so any statement of truth we get out of myth is an abstraction as well. Now how to draw all of this together?

The answer can be found in *The Great Divorce*. A ghostly man who has a passion for inquiry, (though not for actually finding any truth) is visiting the outskirts of heaven. There he meets an old friend who has moved beyond the ghostly stage to full presence, full being in heaven. The glorified man is there to invite the ghost to go further in. But the ghost refuses unless certain guarantees are met, especially "an atmosphere of free inquiry" (43). The glorified man tells his friend he will find no such thing; he will find final answers. The ghost responds that there is "something stifling about the idea of finality" to which the other replies, "You think that, because hitherto you have experienced truth only with the abstract intellect. I will bring you where you can taste it like honey and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom" (43). Thus, in Lewis's vision, what can only be an abstract idea on earth is concrete reality in heaven.

When one leaves the valley of abstraction (our fallen world) for the mountain of myth (the heavenly realm), abstraction and separation disappear as what become abstract truths here in the valley are followed to their concrete mythic sources on the mountaintop. There is, therefore, no place along the stream where one may stop and say, "here is truth but there is myth." The separation no longer exists. Experiencing and thinking simply become knowing.

But how does understanding Lewis's Epistemology help us define meaning? First answer: Meaning can be abstract language statements. But it can also be concrete and can precede language. Look at "Myth Became Fact" again:

> I am trying to understand something very abstract indeed—the fading, vanishing of tasted reality as we try to grasp it with the discursive reason. Probably I have made heavy weather of it. But if I remind you, instead, of Orpheus and Eurydice, how he was suffered to lead her by the hand but, when he turned round to look at her, she disappeared, what was merely a principle becomes imaginable. You may reply that you never till this moment attached that 'meaning' to that myth. Of course not. You are not looking for an abstract 'meaning' at all. If that was what you were doing the myth would be for you no true myth but a mere allegory. You were not knowing, but tasting; but what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle. The moment we

> *state* this principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstraction. It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely." (66)

Lewis is saying that when we take a meaning out of a myth we turn it into an abstract truth statement, an idea. When we leave the meaning in the myth and do not try to turn it into language statements, the meaning remains a concrete experience. In myth, ideas can be experienced as concrete thought.

## Concrete Thought

Imagine a line on a chalkboard representing a spectrum. At one end of the line appears the word "Abstract," and the other end the word "Concrete." The instructor applies these kinds of knowing to the definition of a man. Thus, at the abstract end of the spectrum is written a dictionary definition of a man, followed by a poetical expression of a man, a photograph of a man, and, at the concrete end of the spectrum, the instructor himself standing beneath the line:

| Abstract | | | Concrete |
|---|---|---|---|
| A man (male gender of the species) is a bi-pedal primate capable of speech. | "What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties . . ." (*Hamlet* 2.2.292-93) | Photograph | The Instructor himself |

Nowhere in this spectrum do we yet see "concrete thought." Even the photograph perceived in the imagination is an abstraction of the real man, despite its close approximation to the concrete reality. But where in this spectrum do we fit Tolkien's hobbits? Admittedly hobbits are like people, a version of the human, but in Tolkien's myth they are *not* people, and therefore they are not abstractions of anything. Hobbits are concrete realities; they are *real* imaginary objects, that is, concrete objects of thought. When our minds turn to hobbits, we both think about and experience them at the same time.

A fine example in film of thinking which is experientially immediate yet has the clarity of reasoned thought occurs at the ending of *The Sixth Sense*. The protagonist, a child psychiatrist played by Bruce Willis, has helped a small boy who literally sees the dead to deal with his special gift. But when he tries to restore his own troubled relationship with his wife, he experiences a brilliantly edited "eucatastrophe" (to borrow Tolkien's term). At the moment the hero realizes he is dead, the audience is presented a montage of fleeting images from throughout the film that cause us to remake its meaning in an instant. New knowledge arises with the clarity of reason, but the speed and intensity of direct experience. Those who have seen the film can likely describe the experience thusly: "When I first saw it, I thought I was watching one kind of movie; when I got to this key point of revelation in the film, I reconstructed it in an instant—it happened so fast that I could not immediately put it in words, but I knew and knew it completely." This is an experience of concrete thought. In myth and film, meaning is often communicated with the clarity of reason, the intensity of experience, and without abstract language. One might respond, "But language is used in *The Sixth Sense* scene." Yes, but in it the language does not have the same effect. It is more like sounds than words; the concepts recalled come back to us in an instant, like solid objects.

We are now positioned to make sense of Lewis's "Bluspels and Flalansferes" essay. When we receive myth as story, we are experiencing a principle concretely. Only when we put the experience into words does the principle become abstract. But if we can know a principle either concretely or by abstraction, then meaning can be either concrete or abstract. This agrees with the statement in "Bluspels" that meaning is the necessary antecedent to truth (157). Some meanings are abstract propositions—truth statements. But there are other kinds of meanings which can only be apprehended in the imagination which thinks experientially. Such meanings, the kind we get in myth and film for example, come prior to abstraction and apart from language.

What then is meaning? For Lewis, meaning is *connection*, the perception of a relationship. If we look further at Lewis's theory of myth, this definition will become more clear.

## Myth and Film

Myth is language without language—a mode of *languaging* in form. Myth is a communication which is not in the words used to communicate it but in the form of the myth itself. Lewis explains this in his introduction to *George MacDonald: An Anthology*:

> We all agree that the story of Balder is a great myth, a thing of inexhaustible value. But of whose version—whose *words*—are we thinking of when we say this? For my own part, the answer is that I am not thinking of anyone's words. No poet, as far as I know or can remember, had told this

> story supremely well. I am not thinking of any particular version of it. If the story is anywhere embodied in words, that is almost an accident. What really delights and nourishes me is a particular pattern of events, which would equally delight and nourish if it had reached me by some medium which involved no words at all—say by a mime, or a film (26-27).

Myth communicates meaning apart from language. And the same thing can be said for film.

In "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien rejects the idea that myth is a "disease of language" and argues instead that the opposite is more the case (*The Tolkien Reader* 48). Shyamalan argues a similar point in his film *Unbreakable*. There he sees language as originating in pictures. Says the expert in comic art: "I believe comics are a last link to an ancient way of passing on history. The Egyptians drew on walls. Countries all over the world still pass on knowledge through pictorial forms. I believe comics are a form of history that someone, somewhere, felt or experienced." Though we may not think much of comic books revealing the hidden nature of the universe, Shyamalan is making a point that can be verified and is so by Lewis's good friend Owen Barfield whose book *Poetic Diction* influenced Lewis's epistemology greatly.

In *Unbreakable*, Night offers a theory of myth, of a concrete picture language that precedes modern language forms in which sign abstracts the signified. The image form, surviving in a kind of collective human unconscious, intrudes itself into contemporary culture through comic art. What it reveals is an archetypal pattern of the hero, Joseph Campbell's "monomyth." Night further intuits a quality of communicating which Barfield uncovers in his *Poetic Diction* (45-92). A careful study of linguistic history reveals that a strong distinction between sign and signified, between the literal and the figurative, is new to human thinking. For people before the modern era (even up through the medieval period), to name a thing was to invoke it; speech had physical consequences in the world; words were what they signified; metaphorical meanings were possible because their connective representation was in some way literal. Film resonates with Barfield's view of past language. What it says is what it is, and what is shows is what it means. In the past, words *were* more like pictures, in fact more like physical actions.

The connection between myth and film is clear. Film is a mode of *languaging* which communicates to us like a physical action, as a concrete experience, and it is able to do so either without language or by converting language into experiential form. An example of film communicating as form without language can be seen in Shyamalan's most recent film, *Signs*. Near the end of the film, the family has boarded up its windows and doors in fear of an eminent alien attack. As the attack begins, they realize they have left the dog outside to fend for itself. The family stares at a wall in the family room. Outside the dog is barking. The camera slowly zooms in on the wall. The barking becomes a frenzy, then the growling that accompanies fighting and biting, then the whimper of injury, and finally silence. We never see beyond the family room wall, but we, without words, what has happened to the dog.

**The Crisis of Meaning**

Barfield and Lewis both say words were more like picture, like physical actions *in the past*. What happened? Lewis proposes that an increasing distinction between literal and figurative meanings, between sign and signified, between word as object and abstraction is ultimately traceable to the fall. He describes our world in times closer to the fall when the "Earth itself was more like an animal . . . And mental processes were much more like physical actions" (*That Hideous Strength* 284). It was a time when "matter and spirit were, from our modern point of view, confused" (285). Lewis says that a separation (between spirit and matter and between literal and figurative) has increased because we have viewed the world with an increasingly materialistic bias (in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* [3-4]). Lewis predicts an end to the separation in an eschatological vision of heaven and earth coming together in which fact an myth are "remarried" and literal and metaphorical thinking come "rushing together" again (*Miracles* 211-12). Until then, myth is the means Lewis recognized by which we manage to experience the fullness of meaning that only concrete thought can provide. We may now add film as a mode of *languaging* that will enable us to do the same thing.

Shyamalan captures the crisis of meaning in our current time in his newest film *Signs*. Where *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable* taught us something of what meaning is, *Signs* wrestles with the question of whether life has any meaning at all. In the movie, a minister (played by Mel Gibson) who has lost his faith because of his wife's death relates her last words to his brother, Merrill:

> I never told you the last words that Colleen said before they let her die. She said, "See." Then her eyes glazed a bit. And then she said, "Swing away." Know why she said that? Because the nerve endings in her brain were firing as she died, and some random memory of us at one of your baseball games just popped into her head. There is no one watching out for us, Merrill. We are all on our own.

The Mel Gibson character will later find out that his wife's final words to him were not simply the random firing of neurons in her dying brain but a prophetic revelation he will need to save his son's life. He will learn that there are, indeed, no coincidences, that everything in life has meaning. At the film's end, he has returned to his faith.

**The New Literacy**

A final note: though film uses language to communicate, the best film makers are relying increasingly on pure form in image and sound to communicate meaning that is experientially concrete yet rationally clear. This emerging (or perhaps reemerging) mode of knowing is a rising new literacy that our educational institutions will have to foster. Prior to the invention of the printing press, the majority of people did not have to learn how to read. Life was dependent for most on farming skills. Technology redefined the need for literacy. Computers did the same thing when they became "personal" and "desktop." Computer literacy took only a decade or so to flood the national curriculum. Film and television, however, have been with us for 100 and 50 years respectively. We have assumed for too long that, just because they *can* be watched without learning their language, no literacy is needed. Such is not the case, and, as we turn increasingly from reading to film, television, and visually based computer screens, our need for education in film literacy increases as well.

**The following essay by Catherine Barnett also appears in a recent issue of Saint Austin Review. It is printed here with permission of the editors.**

# Tolkien, MacDonald, and the Cauldron of Story

Catherine Barnett

In his essay, *On Fairy Stories*, J.R.R. Tolkien writes, ". . . the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty" (Tolkien, *Tolkien Reader* 52). Makers of stories are constantly borrowing from one another, spooning into the pages of their works ideas and themes from the Cauldron and adding their own creativity to produce tales unique, y et in many ways familiar. Being well read in the realm of fairy-stories himself, it is not surprising that Tolkien incorporated many elements from the Story Stew into his own tales. In the stories of George MacDonald, with which Tolkien was familiar, one can observe several themes that, being ladled from the Cauldron, may have influenced Tolkien's writing.

As a child, Tolkien enjoyed reading MacDonald's stories. In his biography of Tolkien, Humphrey Carpenter writes, "He was . . . pleased by the 'Curdie' books of George MacDonald, which were set in a remote kingdom where misshapen and malevolent goblins lurked beneath the mountains" (Carpenter, 24). In *On Fairy-stories*, Tolkien mentions having read "The Golden Key" and "The Giant's Heart" in addition to the 'Curdie' books. However, when he reread some of MacDonald's tales later in his life, Tolkien did not like them as much as he had before. He "noted that it was 'illwritten, incoherent, and bad, in spite of a few memorable passages.' [Here apparently referring to "The Golden Key".] Tolkien . . . liked the Curdie books, but found much of Macdonald's writing spoilt for him by its moral allegorical content" (Carpenter, 274).

Apparently his feelings toward the particular story of "The Golden Key" fluctuated somewhat. He calls it a story "of power and beauty" in *On Fairy-stories*. In a letter written in 1964, responding to a request from Pantheon Books to write a preface for a new edition of "The Golden Key," Tolkien wrote, "I am not as warm an admirer of George MacDonald as C.S. Lewis was; but I do think well of this story of his . . . . I am not naturally attracted (in fact much the reverse) by allegory, mystical or moral" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 351).

Although he disliked aspects of MacDonald's writing, Tolkien himself acknowledges their possible influence on his own writing. Addressing the topic of orcs in a letter written to Naomi Mitchison in 1954, he states, "They are not based on direct experience of mine; but own, I suppose, a good deal to the goblin tradition . . . especially as it appears in George MacDonald, except for the soft feet which I never believed in" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 178). He is referring to the goblins in the 'Curdie' books, which have soft feet; a characteristic that his own goblins and orcs do not share. This quote also suggests that both authors were borrowing from sources and traditions older than either of them.

In the preface for the new edition of "The Golden Key"—which, incidentally, was never completed—Tolkien emphasizes this point through one of his less complimentary references to MacDonald: "He probably makes up his tale out of bits of older tales, or things he half remembers, and they may be too strong for him to spoil or disenchant. Someone may meet them for the first time in his silly tale, and catch a glimpse of Fairy, and go on to better things" (Carpenter, 275). Perhaps this is what Tolkien did as a child, treasuring up all the "glimpses of Fairy" he caught through the lens of MacDonald's stories. When Tolkien began to write, these elements from the Cauldron of Story revealed themselves in his own tales. They include female characters in important roles, concealed identity, similar talismans and experiences of characters, use of other ingredients from the "stew," descriptions of eyes, use of light and contrast, and the incorporation of nature and the heavenly bodies.

In the literature of both MacDonald and Tolkien, women play a significant role. MacDonald frequently has as his central character a woman of great beauty, wisdom, mystery, and seeming agelessness, from whom the protagonists receive advice, aid, and sometimes talismans to help them on their respective quests. Tolkien gives great importance to similar women, such as Goldberry or Galadriel, in his stories.

In MacDonald's writing, this central woman is often known as "grandmother" and she is always beautiful, though sometimes her loveliness is hidden or unperceived by the observer. "She was tall and strong, with white arms and neck, and a delicate flush on her face . . . She had not one ornament upon her, but she looked as if she had just put off quantities of diamonds and emeralds" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 18). At the same time she is ancient and wise: ". . . not only was she beautiful, but . . . her hair . . . hung loose far down and all over her back . . . it was white almost as snow. And although her face was so smooth, her eyes looked so wise that you could not have helped seeing she must be old" (MacDonald, *Princess and the Goblin* 20).

Tolkien's elves, especially Galadriel, are reminiscent of the "grandmothers" of MacDonald. Their eyes often betray their age and wisdom. "Very tall they were . . . and they were grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the Lady was of deep gold . . . but no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 369).

Goldberry reminds one especially of the "grandmother" in "The Golden Key" who, like Goldberry, lives in a cottage in the woods that is a haven for travelers. "A beautiful woman rose from the opposite side of the fire and came to meet the girl . . . here she was in the simplest, poorest little cottage, where she was evidently at home. She was dressed in shining green" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 17,18). Of Goldberry, Tolkien writes, "Her long yellow hair rippled down her shoulders; her gown was . . . green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew . . . About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating . . . she sprang lightly up . . . and ran laughing towards them" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 134). Both the women wear green, suggesting their closeness to nature. They welcome their guests warmly and serve them a wonderful meal.

Hidden power and beauty is a major theme in the writings of both authors. It is demonstrated near the end of *The Lost Princess*, when the wise woman, who up to that point was seen as an old crone, suddenly reveals her true self. "She threw her cloak open. It fell to the ground, and the radiance that flashed from her robe of snowy whiteness, from her face of awful beauty, and from her eyes that shone like pools of sunlight, smote them blind" (MacDonald, *Lost Princess* 126). When Gandalf reappears in *The Two Towers* as the White Rider, a similar episode occurs in which Tolkien gives an almost equivalent description using the color white and the light of the sun. "His hood and his grey rags were flung away . . . gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand" (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 97-98). Both of these instances involve characters who appear to some to be old and feeble or unimportant, but when they choose to show themselves in their true forms, they prove to be people of great power and magnificence.

In addition to the characters, some of the talismans in MacDonald's stories are also reflected in Tolkien's works. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, Princess Irene is given a magic ring by her grandmother, which guides her through the dark tunnels of the goblins. The One Ring possessed by Bilbo helps him in a similar way, in that both were used to navigate through the underworld. However, that Ring is essentially of a malevolent nature (although it is not fully revealed as being so until *The Lord of the Rings*); whereas Irene's ring is entirely good, and is nearer in essence to the magic phial which Galadriel gives to Frodo, saying, "May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 393). Its light and power help Frodo and Sam to challenge the horror of Cirith Ungol.

Another talisman, the key kept by Thorin in *The Hobbit*, "a small and curious key . . . with a long barrel and intricate wards, made of silver" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 20), reminds one of the key found by Mossy in "The Golden Key." "The pipe of it was of plain gold, as bright as gold could be. The handle was curiously wrought and set with sapphires" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 14). Each of these keys fit a lock that must be discovered in order to achieve a quest, but that cannot be found except under certain circumstances. The keyhole in *The Hobbit* could only be seen by the light of the setting sun on Durin's Day. When that time came, "A flake of rock split from the wall and fell. A hole appeared suddenly about three feet from the ground" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 190). Mossy's keyhole is also discovered in the face of a rock wall. ". . . as his eyes kept roving hopelessly over it . . . he caught sight of a row of small sapphires. They bordered a little hole in the rock" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 43). Both Thorin and Mossy successfully use their keys and are able to move on to the next stage of their respective journeys.

The experiences leading to the acquisition of talismans and the advice of those who bestow them are often as important as the talismans themselves. Throughout her travels, like many of Tolkien's characters, Tangle in "The Golden Key" faces a series of tests followed by rests. These respites are as vital to the advancement of the story as the perils faced in between, because of what is given to the traveler from those providing refuge, such as knowledge or tools for the quest. After each phase of her journey, Tangle meets in turn "grandmother," the Old Man of the Sea,

the Old Man of the Earth, and the Old Man of the Fire. These characters give her advice and instructions for the next stage of the undertaking, but do not accompany her. Indeed, the Old Man of the Earth remarks, "I wish I could go to see him, but I must mind my work" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 36).

Tom Bombadil gives a similar response to Tolkien's hobbits as they are leaving his land: "Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders. / Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting!" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 159). In his house, the hobbits found rest and refreshment, wisdom and council. As their journey progresses, the companions in *The Lord of the Rings* receive aid, counsel, or tools from a variety of characters—Barliman Butterbur, Elrond, and Celeborn and Galadriel, among others—to prepare them for and help them through the rest of their mission; but they are rarely accompanied by their hosts once they have crossed the margins of their lands.

For MacDonald and Tolkien, however, the borders of their own literary lands extended far and included bits and pieces of other realms, through which they rode at will. Both authors have at least one case in which they borrow a nursery rhyme and counterfeit the history behind it. The nursery rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence" includes the following lines:

> The king was in his counting-house,
> Counting out his money;
> The queen was in the parlour,
> Eating bread and honey.

In "The Light Princess," a scene opens in which "the king went into his counting-house, and counted out his money," and "the queen was in the parlour, eating bread and honey" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 57). Tolkien creates his own version of "Hey Diddle Diddle" through the song Frodo sings at the Inn of the Prancing Pony.

> With a ping and a pong the fiddle-strings broke!
> the cow jumped over the moon,
> And the little dog laughed to see such fun,
> And the Saturday dish went off at a run
> with the silver Sunday spoon.
> (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 172)

In these instances both authors cleverly invent the background story of a well-known nursery rhyme, further borrowing from the riches of the Cauldron of Story.

Characters' eyes play an important part in the tales of MacDonald and Tolkien. As in the cases of the "grandmothers" or the elves, eyes reveal deep wisdom and beauty. MacDonald also puts color and light into the eyes to show what is going on in a person's mind. This is especially illustrated in Princess Makemnoit, a wicked, spiteful witch. "When she was angry, her little eyes flashed blue. When she hated anybody, they shone yellow and green . . . Her eyes, however, shone pink [when] she was happy" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 48-49, 59). Likewise, Gollum's eyes betray his different moods as he debates with himself. "Gollum was talking to himself . . . A pale light and a green light alternated in his eyes as he spoke" (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 240). Some of the crooked schemes of Saruman are also disclosed in this way; ". . . in his eyes there seemed to be a white light, as if a cold laughter was in his heart" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 271).

MacDonald places vivid emphasis on color and the contrast between light and dark. In "The Golden Key," Mossy is drawn into the forest, fascinated by the light of a rainbow. "He had not gone far before the sun set. But the rainbow only glowed the brighter" (MacDonald, *Golden Key* 13). Several episodes in Tolkien's writing are reminiscent of this. Thorin and company are lured off the path in Mirkwood by an elvish feast; ". . . it seemed plain that torches and fires were burning under the trees . . . they all left the path and plunged into the forest" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 137, 138). Beren is enchanted by the beauty of Lúthien, and drawn to her as Mossy was to the rainbow. ". . . And forth he hastened, strong and fleet, / And grasped at moonbeams glistening" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 204).

Elements of nature and especially the heavenly bodies are a common theme in the writing of Tolkien and MacDonald. The "grandmother" of *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie* is often associated with the moon. In her room ". . . hung the most glorious lamp that human eyes ever saw—the Silver Moon itself . . . with a heart of light so wondrous potent that it rendered the mass translucent, and altogether radiant" (MacDonald, *Princess and Curdie* 62). The moon is also emphasized in "The Light Princess" as it shines in the deep water of the lake.

The elves of Tolkien harbor a great love for the moon and stars, as demonstrated in a lullaby sung in Rivendell: "The stars are in blossom, the moon is in flower, / and bright are the windows of Night in her tower" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 267). Galadriel gives to Frodo a phial containing the light of Eärendil, the favorite star of the elves. Even the dwarves appreciate the beauty of the sky, and Gimli is awed by what he sees in the dark lake of Kheled-zâram. "There like jewels sunk in the deep shone glinting stars" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 348).

The wonderful stew found in the great Cauldron of Story was not made by one cook with hoarded and secret recipes, but is still simmering, being sampled and added to by all who are willing to share their own spices and tidbits. It is constantly growing, even as it is dished out, and elements are drawn from the recipes of all the storymakers of history to be re-used in new contexts. In this way Tolkien, as he dipped his ladle into the Cauldron, may have come up with flavors from some of MacDonald's contributions: wisdom and beauty, personified or concealed; various talismans and quest experiences; eyes, glowing with expressive color;

and the moon and the stars. Finding these flavors savory, Tolkien employed them in the creation of his own delicious, masterful dishes.

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# Faith and Reconciliation in the Poetry of C.S. Lewis

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Acclaimed as one of the twentieth century's most influential writers of Christian apologetics and imaginative fiction, C.S. Lewis has ministered to thousands of souls throughout the last century. Yet, from his days as a young student, Lewis most aspired to be a poet. That so few formal critiques of Lewis's poetry have been published is unfortunate as the study of his poetry so completely describes the complexities of Lewis's journey to the Christian faith, a journey that was one both of head and heart. It was this tension between logic and imagination, as well as the struggle to understand the relationship between God and pain, that are the central themes of Lewis's poetry in Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics as well as in A Grief Observed. It is in Grief though, Lewis's last major poetic work (written in poetic prose), that the threads of intellect and imagination are finally woven together to provide Lewis with a new realization of the nature of God, as well as man's relation to Him.

First, it must be noted that in 1939 a debate between Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard was published entitled The Personal Heresy: A Controversy. Lewis, although not a formal New Critic himself, felt that poetry was not meant to be read as that which is "[ . . . ] private and personal to the poet but what is public, common, impersonal, objective" (Lewis, Personal 19). It is also significant to mention that both Spirits and Grief were originally published under pseudonyms, a fact reflecting Lewis's wish for his person to be distanced from his poetry. Though Lewis desired for his poetry not to be read autobiographically, I conclude that his wish must not be granted in this case. A separation between Lewis and his poems would indicate a failure to observe the spiritual journey that connects the first of his major poetic works and the last, for it is in Grief that the tensions evident in Spirits are beautifully reconciled.

It was during Lewis's years under the tutelage of William Kirkpatrick, his aspirations to be a poet took concrete form. Lewis comprised poems in a variety of different notebooks that were later collected to form the basis for Spirits. These poetic writings also continued into the years Lewis served in World War I, an experience that served to provide Lewis with an all too real picture of the deplorable state of the world (King 52). Lewis's intellect led him thus to reason that if there were a God, he must be a sadistic God. More than any other of his poetical works, Spirits (which was published in 1919) offers readers the opportunity to observe the tensions between the intellect and the imaginative mystery that so pervaded Lewis's life. In Surprised By Joy, Lewis acknowledges the tensions that were felt during this time as he writes, "Such then was the state of my imaginative life; over against it stood the life of my intellect. The two hemispheres of my mind were in sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow 'rationalism'" (161-162). Yet, in Spirits these two hemispheres could not be completely reconciled and maintain two distinct threads throughout the work.

Presented in three separate sections, the poems in Spirits fluctuate between a set that Don King refers to as "morose" (70) and another set that he refers to as "sanguine" (70). The morose poems are those in which Lewis asserts his cosmic perspective and the "rankling hate" ("Ode" 46) of a God "[ . . . ] he denies yet blames for man's painful condition" (King 52). Additionally, these poems are strikingly rational as opposed to the sanguine poems that embrace imaginative mystery, for these are the poems of intense longing for a distant land where Lewis will no longer feel alienated and where his deepest yearnings can be fully satisfied. It is particularly interesting to note Lewis's use of the subtitle "A Cycle of Lyrics." In a letter to his father, Lewis claimed that his reason for the subtitle was that "the book is not a collection of really independent pieces, but the working out, loosely of course and with digressions, of a general idea" (qtd. in King 60). This "idea" though is too general to bring any reconciliation to the tensions that exist in Lewis's mind. Much of the

problem, Lewis later admits in Surprised by Joy was that "I was at this time living, like so many Atheists and Antitheists in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with Him for creating a world" (115).

The "Prologue" poem that Lewis writes as an introduction to Spirits provides the doorway to understanding Lewis's struggles as a frustrated dualist standing between intellect and imaginative mystery. In reference to the title, Lewis asserts that humans are spirits living in the bondage of a deplorable world under the chains of a cruel and unmerciful God. "Prologue" establishes the purpose of Lewis's Spirits, that is to move beyond the morose world and to find the answer to the imaginative mystery. Thus, Lewis asserts that to find the answer to the imaginative mystery would resolve all other existing tensions. Lewis describes his goal writing in "Prologue":

> In my coracle of verses I will sing of lands unknown,
> Flying from the scarlet city where a Lord that knows no pity
> Mocks the broken people praying round his iron throne
> —Sing about the Hidden Country fresh and full of quiet green.
> Sailing over seas uncharted to a port that none has seen. (15-23)

Bearing such intentions in mind while reading the "Cycle of Lyrics will demonstrate in the end Lewis's lack of success in arrival at the soul-satisfying coherence of the present tensions.

The first poem in Lewis's cycle, "Satan Speaks" establishes Lewis's view of a cosmic sadist who rules the universe with unrelenting power. Using a series of rhyming couplet statements, Lewis speaks as this God stating, "I am Nature, the Mighty Mother / I am the law: ye have none other" (1-2). It is interesting to notice Lewis's extensive use of "I Am" couplets throughout the poem, because "I Am" is traditionally spoken in reference to the God of the Old Testament. Lewis's extensive literary readings may have exposed him to this phrase that was used by God to describe his own eternal power and unchangeable character in the third chapter of Exodus. To use this phrase repeatedly in "Satan Speaks" indicates Lewis's firm stance that his view on the nature of God would remain unchanged.

Lewis continues Spirits with a poem entitled "Ode for New Year's Day," a poem most clearly and effectively summarizing Lewis's rationalistic argument against God. Here, he follows a logical sequence by building upon the foundation of "Satan Speaks" to detail the terror that the "rankling hate of God" ("Ode" 79) has loosed on the chaotic, troubled world. It is perhaps the words of the third stanza of "Ode for New Year's Day" that strike at the very heart of Lewis's rationalistic case against God, a case that will once again surface in Grief. Lewis writes:

> And O, my poor Despoina, do you think he ever hears
> The wail of the hearts he has broken, the sound of human ill? (67-70)

Thus, Lewis approaches a God who is active in sending pain and destruction and is met with nothing more than a door slammed in his face, a fact that he deeply laments.

In Lewis's rationalistic sequence, a response must thus be issued. Lewis's response is found in "De Profundis," perhaps the most blasphemous of the poems in Spirits. Lewis is left with no other rationalistic, plausible response, although he dualistically acknowledges that "It is but froth of folly to rebel / For thou art Lord and hast the keys of Hell" (25-27), but young Lewis goes on to declare: "Yet I will not bow down to thee nor love thee / For looking in my own heart I can prove thee / And know this frail, bruised being is above thee. (28-30). Three times in the poem Lewis issues the cry that man ought curse the God who cares nothing for the people of the earth. It is vital here to note Lewis's continuous dwelling on the God who does not hear and does not care.

After the establishment of the rationalistic structure of the morose poems, an examination of Lewis's more flowing, sanguine poems is necessary. These are the poems in which Lewis describes the "homeless longing vexing me" ("In Praise" 28). In "The Roads," the man (presumably Lewis) observes the hills of Down. Lewis describes the sight using strongly visual imagery, incorporating phrases such as the "windy uplands" (1), the "misty west" (5), and the "shadowy dell" (8). It is here that the speaker expresses his deep desire to travel the roads that weave between the hills of Down, which he assumes will lead to the source of the mysterious longing that haunts his heart.

This poem is then followed by Lewis's "Song of the Pilgrims," in which the pilgrims repeatedly insist "[t]hat somewhere, somewhere past the Northern snow/ Waiting for us the red-rose gardens blow" (11-12, 65-66), and in "Dungeon Grates," the reader sees that, if only moment, the pilgrim has arrived at the source of the mystery as Lewis writes in the last tine of the poem, "For we have seen the Glory—we have seen" (43), that is, where the "red-rose gardens blow" (12) Although Lewis asserts that this moment in the presence of Glory was enough to "bear all trials that come after" (39), the reader knows that this brief encounter was not lasting as is evidenced by the reoccurring struggles he experiences in Grief.

"Tu Ne Quaesieris" is the poem in which Lewis recognizes that which will bring about the needed eternal reconciliation and through which we see that the preliminary foundations for Lewis's intellectual faith

are established. In his critique of the poem George Sayer writes, "He realizes that, as long as he is confined to his 'narrow self,' there will be a conflict between his will and God's will [ . . . ]" (148). Because Lewis is imprisoned within the bonds of his own self, he sees the world "[a]s through a dark glass [ . . . ]" ("Tu" 19). Lewis questions whether this has resulted in his vision of "[a] warped and masked reality?" (20). Through the poem Lewis acknowledges that his self-centeredness has indeed resulted in a self-constructed view of the world, writing, "And where I end will Life begin" (30). Lewis now realizes that the only way out of the "[ . . . ]warped and masked reality" (20) created by his subjective intellectual reasoning, is for the "searching thought" (21) of his rational mind to be "mingled in the large Divine" (22). It is this "large Divine" whom Lewis will later discover to be the answer to the mysterious longing, that is, God. Thus, Lewis's recognition of these facts establishes the very beginnings of his intellectual faith.

Yet, it is in Lewis's last major poetic work, Grief, that Lewis truly goes beyond intellectual faith and moves toward a faith that also embraces the inclinations of the heart. In contrast to the formal, rhyming verses of Spirits, Grief is a heartfelt stream-of-consciousness type work written in free verse. While the lines of poems in Spirits are outlined in precise symmetry, the heartfelt emotions of Grief are described by Lewis as "[ . . . ] a throw-up from my unconscious" (461). Due to the death of his wife, Lewis reverts back to similar views of God that were demonstrated in Spirits, but it is in Grief that the intellectual faith partially established in Spirits (later more fully established in The Problem of Pain) is finally synthesized with the abstract concept of imaginative mystery.

We here must look back to Lewis's "Satan Speaks." Now a believer in Christ, though struggling once again to make sense of God's nature because of the intense pain of losing his wife, Lewis has omitted his definitive "I Am" statements. Grief is instead peppered with inconclusive statements used to describe God, the majority of which are followed by question marks. In his descriptions, Lewis purports that God may be a "clown" (446) or even a "spiteful imbecile" (450), thus indicating Lewis's openness for understanding.

While many of the blasphemous descriptions of God's nature so strongly used in Spirits reappear in Grief, they appear here in a questioning manner rather than with such blasphemous finality. Several times throughout Grief, Lewis proposes God as a "Cosmic Sadist" (450) a view strikingly similar to that purported in "Ode for New Year's Day" when Lewis describes the "red God" (47) who "[s]hall pour red wrath upon us over a world deform" (23). Lewis, by this time holding onto the threads of his belief in God, is wrestling once again with the concept of a God who would allow such things to happen. Lewis even purports at this point that God not only allows these horrible things to happen but causes them to happen, writing, "[ . . . ] she [Joy] was in God's hands all the time and I have seen what they did to her here [ . . . ] If God's goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine" (449-450). Lewis, in Grief even furthers the possibility of a sadistic God writing, "I am more afraid that we are really rats in a trap. Or worse still, rats in a laboratory" (450).

The rationalistic argument used by Lewis against God in "Ode for New Year's Day" is also clearly connected to Grief. Lewis writes concerning this uncaring God, "But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. And after that, silence" (444). Yet, the closed door lasts not long for Lewis as he comes to a key realization near the end of Grief. This realization establishes the actual role of truth concerning God's relationship to pain, and, ultimately, the full development of Lewis's faith as he finally understands the ways in which the intellect merges with the imagination.

Lewis admits very conclusively his understanding of why the door always seemed to be locked in the following words: "The notes have been about myself, and about H. and about God. In that order. The order and the proportions exactly what they ought not to have been" (Lewis, Grief 459). Thus, Lewis understands that all of his rationally developed viewpoints concerning the nature of God were unjust because they had been developed only from Lewis's personal reality, an understanding that had its foundations in "Tu Ne Quaesieris." Lewis's viewpoints were unjust because they ignored the possibility that the reality of this "sadistic" God may, in fact be very different than Lewis's personal reality. Just as Lewis realized intellectually in "Tu Ne Quaesieris," he now takes the intellectual and imaginative step out of himself and, consequently out of his "[ . . . ] warped and masked reality" ("Tu" 20). To repudiate his own selfishness and acknowledge that God must be the central character is to step out of the masked reality into the fullness of the light of Glory. Here, Lewis admits that he is taking the leap into the "[ . . . ] imaginative activity of an idea which I have theoretically admitted-the idea that I, or any mortal at any time, may be utterly mistaken as to the situation he is really in" (Lewis, Grief 459). Thus, the intellectual faith that had its foundations in "Tu Ne Quaesieris" is combined with the faith of the heart, and the incredible results of reconciliation follow.

Bathed in the light of this new revelation, Lewis continues in Grief to examine the role of God as the great "religious iconoclast" (460). Lewis's new understanding of the True reality, which is outside of himself and inside God, opens the door that had been

bolted for so long. As Lewis states in his famous sermon "The Weight of Glory":

> Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fantasy, but the truest index of our *real* situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache. (104)

The opening of the door casts the light of Glory over all that Lewis has called "reality" and over all that on which he has based his fundamental concepts of God.

Here, the great "iconoclast" shines his light over the green hills of Down, the satyrs, and the wider oceans of Lewis's "The Roads" and reveals that in the True reality, they are simply images. These images are a lesser form of something much greater and serve merely as links between Lewis's selfishly conceived reality and the True reality. In "The Weight of Glory," Lewis captures this idea beautifully as he states, "It is not the physical images [the hills, the satyrs, the oceans] that I am speaking of, but that indescribable something of which they become for a moment the messengers" (103). Through the shattering of the "dark glass" ("Tu" 19) by the iconoclast, the messengers are no longer needed because Lewis is able to see the very Thing himself. Thus, he writes in the last chapter of Grief, "I need Christ not something that resembles Him" (459). Brought finally into the fullness of that land beyond "[ . . . ] the Northern snow / where red-roses gardens blow" ("Song of the Pilgrims" 65-66), Lewis states, "I mustn't sit down content with the phantasmagoria [the compilation of Lewis's thoughts, passions, and imaginings] itself and worship that for Him [ . . . ] Not my idea of God, but God" (Lewis, Grief 460).

It is here that Lewis's rational mind is satisfied. Total oneness with the great creator of the imaginative mystery has made Lewis understand that rationality is no longer of any matter. Frustrated dualism is out the door and Lewis stands in the open door looking at the loving God. In response to the difficulties voiced in both Spirits and Grief concerning the relationship between God and pain, Lewis writes:

> When I lay these questions before God, I get no answer. But a rather special sort of "No answer." It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate gaze. As though he shook His head not in refusal but waving the question. Like, "Peace, child, you don't understand." (460)

A great contrast to Lewis's God in "De Profundis" who mockingly laughed at the attempts of men to "gather wisdom rare," (8) Lewis's arrival at the great Romancer himself, who has been wooing Lewis with his messengers of the longing, has revealed more completely that which intelligence really is. In one of the last stanza-paragraphs of Grief Lewis reveals his new definition of "pure intelligence" (462). He writes that it is that which "[w]e cannot understand. The best is perhaps what we understand the least" (462). It is here when Lewis has finally finished his pilgrim journey on "The Roads" that he has found Heaven and the "homelessness" that once vexed him is cured (Lewis, "In Praise" 28). As Lewis writes concerning the tensions between intellect and romance and the concurrent tension of God and pain: "Heaven will solve our problems, but not, I think by showing us subtle reconciliations between all our apparently contradictory notions. The notions will all be knocked under our feet. We shall see that there never was any problem" (461).

Thus, Lewis realizes that which he could not fully understand until his selfish reality had been shattered. His spirit, released from bondage is set free, and he has found the Truest of all realities. Indeed, as Lewis comes to understand, no longer must he merely be "one / with the eternal stream of loveliness" for only a brief moment (Lewis, "Dungeon" 28-29). Instead, the last stanza-paragraph of Grief pictures the eternal reconciliation through Lewis's account of his wife in Heaven. Like Joy, his arrival at this understanding leads his to say, "I am at peace with God" (Grief 462). The "overstrong desire / to swim forever [ . . . ]" in the loveliness of the eternal stream is thus fulfilled entirely in the presence of the Lord. Lewis illustrates this beautiful truth through Joy as Lewis writes, "Then she turned herself back toward the eternal fountain" (462). Through the process of his grief, Lewis comes to these realizations, concluding that there in the rose-red garden that he always knew existed, he stands like Joy, smiling toward the Object Himself Who has been calling. It is in this True reality that Lewis is disinterested in looking back to the physical world. Here, he is without even a hint of desire to ask meaningless questions, because he is one forever with the eternal peace-giving "[ . . . ] stream of loveliness" (Lewis, "Dungeon" 30).

It is evident from the study of Lewis's poetry that his journey to faith was not a simple one. Living in the War era of England was difficult under any circumstances, but Lewis was one individual whose struggle was particularly difficult. Viewed within the broad context of twentieth century literature, Lewis's poetry may play a seemingly insignificant role due to its lack of popularity, but it is in his poetry that the true struggle of every modern man lays. His journey through disillusionment provides a unique picture of the power of God in the midst of a seemingly chaotic world.

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# ‘A Very Odd Piece of Work’: A Glimpse into Dorothy L. Sayers’s Nurture and Development of the Detective Story Genre

Anne Marie Hardy

“What a piece of work is man, that he should enjoy this kind of thing! A very odd piece of work—indeed, a mystery.” So concludes Dorothy L. Sayers’s masterful essay introducing the anthology, *The Omnibus of Crime: Great Short Stories of Detection*. Sayers’s love for detective fiction, combined with her skill in creating and critiquing it, allowed her career as a detective novelist to center on nurturing and re-defining the genre of the detective story, seeking to secure its place among the ranks of legitimate literature. Sayers endeavored to root the genre in the tradition of canonized literature even as she argued for changes in order to ensure its preservation. This effort and the ideas and challenges she espoused concerning the genre, specifically as described in her anthology’s introductory essay, came to fruition in the writing of her final Lord Peter Wimsey novel, *Busman’s Honeymoon*.

Though Sayers reportedly began studying the detective story because “that is where the money is,” it is clear that she cared deeply about her own work in the detective story genre as well as the genre in general (qtd. in Hitchman 37). Sayers demonstrated her love of the detective story as a genre in three ways. First, Sayers’s introductory essay and editing work for the 1928 anthology, *The Omnibus of Crime*, reveal her dedication to the genre. Critic Laura Krugman Ray assures that “[Sayers’] introductions to the three editions of the *Omnibus of Crime* are generally ranked among the best essays in the field” (172). The first introduction meticulously traces the antiquity of the form, its development from figures such as Poe, the ‘rules of the game’ and its relationship to other literary genres, from which it derives its lifeblood and momentum. Secondly, her involvement with the Detection Club (which she joined in 1928) led her to create an oath in which she defines the laws that should govern good detective fiction. These laws, for example, demand that detectives to use their own wits, “not placing any reliance upon . . . Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or the Act of God” (Hitchman 104). Thirdly, her remarks on her own novels betray her deep passion for the genre. She claimed, for example, that *The Nine Tailors* was a “labour of love” and *Gaudy Night* was “the book I wanted to write” (Reynolds 271; Hitchman 86). Most poignantly, in the dedication letter for *Busman’s Honeymoon*, the novel under discussion here, she writes, “I humbly bring, I dedicate with tears, this sentimental comedy.”

As much as Sayers revered the detective genre, however, she was not ignorant of its limitations. She realized that serious changes would have to occur to ensure the genre’s preservation and the realization of its potential. In the introduction to the *Omnibus* anthology, Sayers candidly admits that the detective author’s “bag of tricks” is quite limited (17). She explains that after one has read “half a dozen” stories by any certain author, one may understand the author well enough to predict mystery solutions (44). This leads readers to become unsatisfied with that author’s later works. In 1928, the typical detective story was merely a mind game between the author and reader; the author tried to outwit the reader as the reader pieced together clues. Because this “pure puzzle is a formula which obviously has its limitations,” Sayers warns that, quite possibly, “the detective-story will some time come to an end, simply because the public will have learnt all the tricks” (20, 44). Because of the typical “reduction of character-

drawing to bold, flat outline," there is little purpose for the reader's attention other than that of solving of the mystery (12). Herein lays Sayers's clue to the means of saving the detective story.

Sayers proposes the necessity of creating fuller, more meaningful characters in detective fiction, predicting that the genre will evolve, with a "new and less rigid formula" that would draw the detective novel closer "to the novel of manners" (Sayers, "Introduction" 44, 38). The detective who dominates the pages of a story must therefore "achieve a tenderer human feeling" (38). Sayers recognizes that, "As the detective ceases to be impenetrable and infallible and becomes a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities, so the rigid technique of the art necessarily expands a little" (37).

Because Sayers recognized and believed in the necessity of these shifts, she was able to take risks in her own work. "My voice," Sayers writes, "was raised very loudly to proclaim this doctrine" of moving the detective novel to become "once more a novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle" ("Gaudy Night" 209). Sayers proclaimed this precisely because "I still meant my books to develop along those lines at all costs" (209). When Sayers wrote the introduction, she had already authored five Peter Wimsey novels and was likely scared of becoming predictable and losing reader interest. After her "Introduction," Sayers was possibly unsure where to begin her revisions, writing one more typical Wimsey novel before daringly beginning to create a more life-like Lord Peter in *Strong Poison*. Here, Sayers embraced the enormous risk of introducing a love story. According to biographer David Coomes, this is precisely the element that gives Wimsey his first "hint of the human about him" (111-112). Though Dorothy might have feared that readers would begin discovering her detective's tricks soon enough, they certainly would not be able to predict just how the strong-willed Peter and Harriet would (if ever) believably fall into each other's arms.

Sayers further embeds detective fiction within standard literature through showing its interaction with other, more critically acclaimed genres. Since the detective story has existed in one form or another for thousands of years, the first four stories in Sayers's anthology come from ancient sources. In her introduction, as she traces the development of the genre, she focuses on the influence of the canonized literary genius, Edgar Allen Poe. Through demonstrating how so much of the modern genre in question stems from Poe's paradigm, Sayers gives the genre a firm foundation of literary legitimacy.

Sayers then places the figure of the detective in the tradition of ancient literary heroes. Explaining that society now looks to new public heroes, Sayers writes, "But if one could no longer hunt the manticora, one could still hunt the murderer" (13). Thus, "the detective steps into his right place as the protector of the weak—the latest of the popular heroes, the true successor of Roland and Lancelot" (13). Lord Peter's potentially snobbish upper-class mannerisms may be "all part of modernizing the King Arthur legend" (Hitchman 99).

The hero of *The Song of Roland*, which Dorothy translated in 1957, shows particular similarities to Wimsey. Translator Howard S. Robertson writes of how Roland bears "the burden of being a legend in his own time" and the *Song* "present[s] less a celebration of the hero than the examination of his role" (*x*). *The Song of Roland* causes the reader to question the "ambiguities of justice"; Sayers's presentations of Wimsey, particularly in *The Nine Tailors* and the end of *Busman's Honeymoon*, raise similar issues (Robertson *x*).

Perhaps the most obvious way in which Sayers roots her work within other genres of literature is through her use of a vast array of quotations. Many of the chapters in the Wimsey novels (including every chapter in the final three works) are prefaced by a literary quote ranging from the English Romantic poets, to Shakespeare, to Sheridan Lefanu. A particularly effective quote comes in chapter nineteen of *Busman's Honeymoon*, with lines from T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. Peter's dream, which opens the body of the chapter, invokes Eliot's imagery of confused and empty wandering in the desert (Sayers, *Busman's* 308). A reference to the dream at the close of the chapter, though somewhat awkward, nonetheless achieves Sayers's purpose of creating a world that interacts with other literature. Harriet Vane also interacts with other texts as she buys an original John Donne manuscript letter for Peter's wedding present and elsewhere jokingly refers to herself as Jane Eyre (24, 25).

The rate and style of quoting borders on pedantic in *Busman's Honeymoon.* Quotes are tossed back and forth "on the slightest pretext" between Harriet, Peter and the constable (Hitchman 97). The novel ends with a lengthy quotation from John Donne's "Eclogue for the Marriage of the Earl of Somerset" (Sayers, *Busman's* 380-381). Though Hitchman condescendingly attributes this incessant quoting to Sayers's feeble attempts at filling out the original stage-play version of the story into a full length novel, Sayers's purpose may have been not only to boast about how literate she was herself, but also to enforce the idea that her characters were players in the larger metanarrative of literature.

Even as Sayers fervently attempts to broaden the formulas for her beloved genre and root that genre within canonized and historical literature, she stresses the necessity of following certain established rules in the writing of detection fiction. She realizes that some rules are necessary. As emphasized in her Detection Club oath and elsewhere, Sayers strongly valued the rule of "fair play" (Sayers, "Introduction" 33). This rule, as stated in S.S. Van Dine's 1928 article, "Twenty rules for writing detective stories," asserts, "The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated

and described." Sayers laments that authors such as Sir Arthur Canon Doyle disagree (Sayers, "Introduction" 32). Further respecting the rights and intelligence of the reader, Sayers also affirms that "the real criminal must be suspected at least once in the course of the story" and that the detective must use his or her wits without relying on "Divine Revelation," "Mumbo Jumbo" or the like (Sayers, "Introduction" 42; Hitchman 104). Sayers also argues that the mystery should be the primary focus and warned in the 1928 article that "the love is better left out" ("Introduction" 40). As was obvious only two years later, Sayers sometimes found even the rules she once upheld to be too constricting.

Much of Sayers's decision to push the boundaries stems from her desire to go back to those roots of detective fiction found in Wilkie Collins. Sayers admired Collins fervently, describing *The Moonstone* as "probably the very finest detective story ever written," and crediting the author with paving the way for the English detective story to rise "to its present position of international supremacy" (Sayers, "Introduction," 25; Reynolds 271). This immense reverence, revealing itself in an unfinished biography of Collins, focused on his ability to create characters (Reynolds 271). Sayers identifies Collins as one of the great Victorians (along with Dickens and Reade) who "firmly [bound] together the novel of plot and the novel of character" (271). Sayers recognized that Collins was atypical of most detective authors, exclaiming of him, "how admirably the characters are drawn!" ("Introduction" 25).

Sayers's efforts in imitating Collin's characterization and creating a new type of detective novel culminate in *Busman's Honeymoon*. Here, she tackles the most difficult tasks she identifies in her "Introduction" in hopes of benefiting the entire genre. Sayers recognizes that *Gaudy Night* (1935) is less of a detective story than it is a psychological treatment of the theme of intellectual integrity; she removes detection from the primary focus (Reynolds 289). In *Busman's Honeymoon*, the characters are at last the main focus of the novel, reminiscent of Wilkie Collins's masterpiece, *The Woman in White*. Just as the reader of Collins's work is chiefly interested in Walter, Laura and Marian's ultimate happiness, Sayers's readers are likely to be primarily eager to discover just how Harriet and Peter will find marital bliss and interdependence. The discovery of a murder in *Busman's Honeymoon* is left until page 109, when the reader is already enthralled in Harriet and Peter's honeymoon story. Sayers makes no pretences about her intentions regarding the focus of the novel; the subtitle reads, "A Love Story with Detective Interruptions."

Sayers realizes that only the most careful and important love story could hold its place in a good detective novel. This is the goal for which she strives in introducing and continuing the Peter-Harriet love story through *Strong Poison* (1930), *The Nine Tailors* (1934), *Gaudy Night* (1935) and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1938). Sayers accomplishes her task through revising the hypothesis she made in 1928 that the mystery must come first in importance in the detective-story. In *Busman's Honeymoon*, love reigns as Peter and Harriet at last enjoy marital bliss and moments of ecstatic emotion (particularly in the first half of chapter sixteen, "Crown Matrimonial") even while characteristically joking about the distastefulness of their indulgence in sentimentality.

In all this, however, Sayers abides by some of the unwavering rules she upholds in her essay. Harriet and Peter's emotions do not "make hay of the detective interest" (Sayers, "Introduction" 40). The clues are fairly displayed to the reader, the villain is a suspect during the investigation and Peter's love for Harriet does not prevent him from solving the crime. Thus, Sayers effectively satisfies readers' desire for a solvable crime, even while removing the crime from the focus. Her reasons for doing this, as moving toward a style of a novel of manners, are stated in her in the opening dedicatory letter. Sayers writes, "It has been said, by myself and others, that a love-interest is only an intrusion upon a detective story. But to the characters involved, the detective-interest might well seem an irritating intrusion upon their love-story." And so it would have been. If Sayers was to be true to her characters in accordance with her views of authorship expressed in *The Mind of the Maker*, she had to give the characters a will of their own even while they remained her own creations. In such circumstances, it would have been untrue to the integrity of Sayers's writing had she forced Peter and Harriet to place supreme importance on the murder mystery in the midst of their honeymoon.

Yet another challenge which Sayers uniquely accepts in *Busman's Honeymoon* is that of taking a humanist outlook regarding the fate of the villain. Sayers writes in her essay, "To make the transition from the detached to the human point of view is one of the writer's hardest tasks" (38). She accepts this task through making Crutchley and Peter both real people. "When the murderer has been made human and sympathetic" she warns, " . . . a real person has then to be brought to the gallows, and this must not be done too lightheartedly" (38). She then gives examples of detective writers who have avoided this difficulty. Chesterton allows Father Brown to drop his involvement in affairs before the accused is arrested and executed (38). Some authors allow their villain a dignified suicide in order to avoid complications of emotion (38). If the villain is 'monstrous' enough, no one is bothered by his execution (38). Sayers carefully avoids all of these approaches in her final novel.

Though Peter seems to often leave the scene before the execution, Sayers finally confronts the horror directly. Through Harriet, Sayers writes that a detective commonly "unmask[s] his murderer with a flourish of *panache* in the last chapter . . . leaving somebody else to cope with the trivial details of putting the case

together" (Sayers, *Busman's* 345). In contrast, Peter suffers through the hearings, giving testimony, bearing the burden of town gossip and attempting to attain Crutchley's forgiveness. Most dramatically, Sayers heeds no warnings of attaching too much emotion to characters and shows Peter in all his agony as he copes with the fact that Crutchley will be hanged as a direct result of his sleuthing. This is exactly the difficulty Sayers warns of in her essay. "The farther [the detective story] escapes from pure analysis" she writes, "the more difficulty it has in achieving artistic unity" (Sayers, "Introduction" 37). Because of this difficulty, Sayers writes that her genre "rarely touches the heights and depths of human passion" and instead "looks upon death and mutilation with a dispassionate eye" (37). At the end of the novel, however, as Peter and Harriet wait for the moment of Crutchley's execution, Sayers looks upon these things:

> "Quite suddenly, he said, 'Oh, damn!' and began to cry—in an awkward, unpractised way at first, and then more easily. So she held him, crouched at her knees, against her breast, huddling his head in her arms that he might not hear eight o'clock strike" (Sayers, *Busman's* 380).

Sayers had avoided falsifying her characters in other works; she abandoned plans, for example, to marry Peter and Harriet at the end of *Strong Poison* because it would have been untrue to the characterization (Coomes 111). Therefore, when she produced *Busman's Honeymoon* so lovingly, she must have considered herself to have achieved artistic unity. From the lack of critical reviews to the contrary, it appears her audience believes her to have accomplished just that.

Having met her self-proclaimed greatest challenges in detective fiction writing, Sayers merely dabbled in the genre after completing *Busman's Honeymoon*. She published a small collection of detective short stories, including a few about Wimsey in 1939. She wrote the first 170 pages of another Harriet and Peter novel entitled *Thrones, Dominations* yet never finished the work, instead hiding the manuscript in her attic (Coomes 119). The unfinished portion of *Thrones, Dominations* reportedly gives not "so much as a hint of a crime" (119). She realized that her desire to write straight fiction had overtaken her; rather than squeeze Lord Peter into a new mold, she abandoned his character and headed in new directions altogether. Sayers devoted the rest of her career to the writing of theological plays and essays and medieval research and translation projects.

Dorothy L. Sayers clearly held the detective story in high regard and devoted an abundance of time and effort to nurturing, defining and contributing to the genre. Her writings show deep concern and love for the genre as she seeks to establish its place as rooted firmly in historical and canonized literature. As part of her concern for the betterment of detection fiction, Sayers outlines and upholds certain conventions and rules even as she argues for the necessary expansion of the formulas. In predicting the direction in which the genre must move, she shows that the detective novel must embrace the tradition of Wilkie Collins and move toward the standards of the novel of manners. Sayers then accepts her own challenge and gradually makes her own detective novels evolve toward a more character-based approach. Her hopes for the genre, as well as the greatest challenges she predicted, culminate in her masterpiece, *Busman's Honeymoon*. Here, even while Sayers lays out a murder, inspection and solution, Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane finally have the spotlight in the novel as real human beings of more importance than the detection process itself. Sayers's contributions to the thought and substance of the detective genre were not in vain; she remains widely read, her person is deeply admired, and the detection genre remains very much alive today.

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# The Voice of C.S. Lewis

Zan Bozzo

I have searched long and hard to find a specific sentence that has always been at the forefront of my mind. Needless to say, I still have not found it, and so I am forced to use my own words to capture its meaning. In an attempt to give credit to its author, I believe that it is hidden within Chesterton's, *The Everlasting Man*, or Boethius's grand work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. The quotation, as I remember it, states, "God's greatest gift to mankind is found in both Reason and Imagination." Now, excluding Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and possibly, free will, Reason and Imagination are indeed two of the greatest gifts given to mankind. The writings and teachings of C.S. Lewis are largely based on these two elements. Together they are the sponge that inevitably absorbs the reader. There is a third element that makes Lewis's writing so profound, namely Tone. These three elements: Reason, Imagination, and Tone are what constitute the voice of C.S. Lewis. Through this voice, many, both young and old, believer and unbeliever, skeptic and supporter, have come to view Christianity in a new light.

In an argument against evolution, G.K. Chesterton, in his notable work, *The Everlasting Man (EM)*, ironically painted a picture of the inherent human trait we have come to call Imagination. Based on the prehistoric paintings found throughout cavernous dwellings, Chesterton made the point that man, from the very beginning, has always been separated from the animals. The ability to paint, create, and ultimately, imagine, is a unique attribute solely found in mankind. Chesterton writes, "When all is said, the main fact that the reindeer men attests, along with all other records, is that the reindeer men could draw and that the reindeer could not" (*EM*, 34). Drawing from this evidence, Chesterton concludes, "In all sobriety, he [the cave-man] has much more of the external appearance of one bringing alien habits from another land than of a mere growth of this one" (36). Whether mankind shares some ancestor with the apes is a separate issue entirely and has little to do with the voice of C.S. Lewis. The reason for mentioning the above quotations is to show the distinction between man and beast. Man has been given something that no other creature in this world possesses. The Bible tells us that Reason and Imagination are attributes of our God. Created in His image, we too are given these rare and unique abilities.

Chesterton's depiction certainly says something about creativity and imagination, but what does it have to say about Reason? During that particular illustration Chesterton doesn't mention Reason specifically. This is due to the fact that he is already utilizing this gift. He is Reasoning and forcing the reader to Reason with him. Just as a painter doesn't have to talk about imagination or creativity when he paints, the logician says nothing about Reason when he thinks rationally. Chesterton's actions and writings speak for themselves.

The importance of reasoning is apparent in all of C.S. Lewis's writings. Each chapter is designed to be an exploration for truth. This method of thinking appears in Plato's, *The Republic*, in which Plato uses, "penetrating and dialectical reasoning with poetic imagery and symbolism" (*Political Thinkers*, 2) as a technique to portray his ideal state. But before going further, it is necessary to identify Lewis's love for reasoning and note its roots. In his autobiography, *Surprised By Joy (SJ)*, Lewis comments on his education during his earlier life at a boarding school he often referred to as "Oldie's School." While failing to see many beneficial experiences with his teacher Oldie, Lewis does, however, recognize one fact, ". . . [Oldie] forced us to reason, and I have been the better for those geometry lessons all my life" (*SJ*, 29*)*. While at Oxford, Lewis and his group of friends, the Inklings, met frequently at the Eagle and Child to reason together on life's mysteries. Lewis's conversion is a testimony in of itself. As an atheist, Lewis searched for truth, and through Reason and Imagination, came to the conclusion that there was indeed a God.

But why is it necessary to use Reason? What good can come of it? A natural inclination of man is to question one's existence. When searching for this truth, inevitably one runs into questions that are broad in nature and have little "real" and present evidence to draw conclusions from. There is, however, some

evidence, and the process of thinking based on this evidence is Reason. Lewis acknowledges this when he writes, "The problem is not simple and the answer is not going to be simple either" (*MC*, 42). That is the very reason we need to utilize our precious gift of rational thinking. Saint Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century philosopher and theologian, once wrote, "The light of reason is placed by nature in every man, to guide him in his acts towards his end" (*Political Thinkers*, 128). When Lewis talks about the four cardinal virtues, he places "prudence" at the head of the list, writing:

> Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think about what you are doing and what is likely to come of it. Nowadays most people hardly think of Prudence as one of the 'virtues.' In fact, because Christ said we could only get into His world by being like children, many Christians have the idea that, provided you are 'good,' it does not matter being a fool. (77)

The significance of prudence is also expressed in *The Screwtape Letters (SL)* from the point of view of a Senior Demon named Screwtape, who is instructing his nephew in the art of bringing men to sin. "By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient's reason, who can foresee the result?" (*SL*, 2). Screwtape goes on to say, ". . . strengthening in your patient the fatal habit of attending to universal issues and withdrawing from that stream of immediate sense experiences" (2). Clearly Lewis is demonstrating to the reader that the best defense against turning from the 'good' is through Reason. The "immediate sense experiences" Lewis refers to are the very things that distract us from Reason. They are the idols we build for ourselves, the mortal pleasures we so often see in every day life. And if they distract us from Reason, they distract us from truth, which sends us down a road leading away from our God. It is important to remember two things with regard to Reason: (1) Reason is influenced by "external impressions," as Epictetus puts it, which can lead to wrong conclusions, and (2) we are given the ability to think rationally because we are created in the image of our God. We must remember that C.S. Lewis, one of the world's greatest logical thinkers, was once an atheist. This bright mind, for years, was under the illusion that he reasoned through life's greatest unknowns. Lewis was using his Reasoning abilities, however, all reasoning is based on some form of external impression. Some form of information or experience. And so Reasoning, with the correct information, can lead to some amazing discoveries. On the other hand, incorrect information, even through the use of correct Reasoning, can lead to false conclusions. Lewis writes, "He is the source for which all of your reasoning power comes; you could not be right and He wrong any more than a stream can rise higher than its own source" (*MC*, 48). This illusion of Reason is simply; as Screwtape puts it, jargon. "Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church" (*SL*, 1).

One of C.S. Lewis's most noticeable contributions, even to unbelievers, is his point that Jesus was one of three things. Many people hold Jesus up as a "great moral teacher" but reject his claim to be the Son of God. Lewis reasons through their "foolish thinking," as he puts it, and writes that Jesus had to be one of the following: a lunatic, a liar, or the Son of God. "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher" (*MC*, 52). This is just one of the many examples in which Lewis seems to step beyond typical human understanding and manages to brilliantly introduce some rational results.

"Art is the signature of man" (*EM*, 34). A signature is something completely unique to the individual. It is a manner of identification. To say "art is the signature of man" is to say that art is truly unique and the product of mankind. I agree with Chesterton in that art is the signature of man when it comes to our relationship with the other living creatures of this world. Art, however, is really the signature of God, and this says something about the magnitude of this gift. Created in His image, our Reason and Imagination are mere reflections of His. A sculptor creating the intricate details of the human body, the various muscles and features, is an amazing work of art. A painter depicting the setting sun on a peaceful ocean is a true representation of Imagination. These creations, though beautiful and enchanting, are still minute reflections of the vast imagination of God. No human art can compare to the mind-boggling mechanics of the human body or the astonishing world we live on. This is not to say that we are not to create art. On the contrary, it is a gift only given to one species in this world; it is a tool to capture the presence of our Lord. "Monkeys did not begin pictures and men finish them" (*EM*, 34). We should rejoice in the fact that we are created in the image of God and that we can share in that creative nature.

Lewis is constantly using the power of Imagination to portray and enhance his thoughts. Through his imaginative and creative written works, Lewis enables the reader to see the lessons one can learn through rational thinking. Viewing these thoughts in fictional form often appeals to a wide audience, commonly including children where the more nonfiction-oriented pieces would be far too advanced for them. Probably Lewis's best known written work is the series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Directed toward a younger audience, the reader is ushered into a fictional world full of allegory and meaning. While Lewis may have been writing the Narnian tales primarily for sheer pleasure, he takes advantage of the opportunity to add Reason into the Imaginative atmosphere. In his most popular book of the series, *The Lion, The Witch, and*

*The Wardrobe (LWWW)*, Lewis reasons through the role of Christ, which is portrayed by the lion Aslan. "'Safe?' said Mr. Beaver . . . 'Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe, but he's good. He's the King, I tell you'" (*LWWW*, 86).

Throughout the seven books of the series, one can find these rational hidden meanings, enlightened through the power of Imagination. Located in *The Magicians Nephew (MN)*, Aslan talks of the White Witch who is a representation of the Devil. The following quote, through Reason, illuminated by the Imagination, teaches us of what becomes of an evil heart:

> 'She has won her hearts desire; she has unwearying strength and endless days like a goddess. But length of days with an evil heart is only length of misery and already she begins to know it. All get what they want. They do not always like it.' (*MN*, 208).

Readers witness the dramatic re-portrayal of the sacrifice of Christ as Aslan gives himself up to the White Witch to be sacrificed for the sins of one of the story's main characters, Edmund. Aslan, however, is found throughout all seven of the books, guiding the children and those who dwell in the fictional world. Through this imaginative work, one can see many things that would often be difficult to visualize in a work of nonfiction.

Another notable work of fiction stemming from the hand and mind of C.S. Lewis is *The Great Divorce (GD)*. Given the freedom of Imagination, Lewis explores the contrasting natures of Heaven and Hell. The story begins in a corner of Hell as a group of individuals, or "phantoms"—as they are soon to find out—head on a trip to Heaven. Christians are often presented with the question, often from nonbelievers but at times from believers as well, "Why can't God just send all of us to Heaven?" Before I read *The Great Divorce*, I am not really sure I fully understood the answer to this question. But through the imaginative narrative of Lewis, he showed me the answer rather than telling it. Upon reaching Heaven, the main character begins to walk through this new land, and commented, "Walking proved difficult. The grass, hard as diamonds to my unsubstantial feet, made me feel as if I were walking on wrinkled rock, and I suffered pains like those of the mermaid in Hans Andersen" (*GD*, 25). This is but one reference to the idea that Heaven will cease to be Heaven to those who aren't worthy of being there. It would be their Hell. It would be too good for them.

*The Great Divorce* is full of intriguing conversations between the sinful "phantoms" of Hell and the godly spirits of Heaven. Each conversation—only meaningful because of our imaginative nature—teaches the reader some useful and extraordinary truths through the process of Reason. One such conversation reveals an unbeliever's stubborn attitude toward dealing with one's faults:

> 'Oh, of course. I'm wrong. Everything I say or do is wrong, according to you.' 'But of course!' said the Spirit, shining with love and mirth so that my eyes were dazzled. 'That's what we all find when we reach this country. We've all been wrong! That's the great joke. There's no need to go on pretending one was right! After that we begin living' (102).

Through these illustrations Lewis explores the themes of sin, temptation, addiction, love, and many others. Presented in this unique light, made available by the imagination, one can grasp its meaning as if they had lived it.

It is apparent now that both Reason and Imagination were central to Lewis's method of thinking. It is often said amongst Lewis admirers, myself included, that when reading Lewis it seemed as if he could predict exactly what you were thinking. There have been times when reading his books in which I thought to myself, "Well . . . yes, I can see that. But what if . . ." and sure enough, in the next paragraph, Lewis would start off, "You might say . . ." (*MC*, 19) or "I am going to venture a guess . . ." (*MC*, 87). It's as if I weren't reading at all, instead, as if Lewis were conversing before me. Jill Freud, who stayed at the Kilns during the Second World War, once said, "I couldn't look at him or speak to him for a week, because I knew from reading his books that he understood human nature horribly well, and I just thought, he will know all my thoughts, all my nasty little foibles. I felt completely exposed" (*Christianity Today*, 23). This conversational approach is the final element that makes Lewis's writing so profound. It's what we'll call Tone.

Kathleen Norris, in her foreword to *Mere Christianity* wrote, "This book . . . is a work of oral literature" (*MC*, XVII). In part, Norris was referring to the fact that *Mere Christianity* was first broadcasted before making it into print. However, that same Tone which Lewis so easily seems to create in *Mere Christianity*, continues in his following works, labeling all "oral literature." J.I. Packer once confirmed the remarks of Lewis's stepson, Douglas Gresham, "'If you want to learn how to do Christianity, read C.S. Lewis, and he'll tell you.' So said Douglas Gresham, Lewis's stepson, and he was right" (*Southern Cross Quarterly*). Again, his longtime friend Owen Barfield reinforces the unique Tone of C.S. Lewis, who once said, "Somehow what Lewis thought about everything was secretly present in what he said about anything" (*Pineapple*, 2*)*.

Jeffrey Schultz and John West Jr. write about this blend of Reason and Imagination, remarking in their *C.S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia (RE)*, "Beyond the

comprehensibility of his apologetics to the common man, and the depth and beauty of his fiction, this fusion of Rationalism and Romanticism can be considered his subtlest, yet most far-reaching accomplishment" (*RE*, 349).

C.S. Lewis has become one of the best known twentieth century thinkers. His brilliant reasoning, captivating imagination, and conversational tone have influenced a wide audience and are becoming models for tackling life's toughest questions. Lewis himself summarized perfectly his method of telling truth in one of his frequent letters to his friend, Owen Barfield, writing, "For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning" (*RE*, 349).

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# Ascending and Descending: Suffering, Spiritual Growth and Co-inherence in Charles Williams's *Descent Into Hell*

Jessica D. Dooley

*"But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ,*
*so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*
*1 Peter 4:13*

Charles Williams's sixth novel, *Descent Into Hell*, illustrates the nature of reality, suffering, and spiritual growth in vivid, fantastic images. It is illuminating, electrifying, petrifying. Perhaps Williams succeeds so well in communicating about reality because the book is so fantastic: C.S. Lewis proposed "that by casting [spiritual realities] into an imaginary world . . . one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency." Williams's writing is certainly potent; it startles all the fiery skepticism out of his readers' "watchful dragons." His message is one of eternal significance: the individual must surrender the self to the reality God ordains, including suffering and joy, in order to become most wholly who God intends them to be.

The premise that Williams applies to every character in *Descent Into Hell* is that the individual's daily decisions—whether to give the self or relationships primacy, to embrace duty or refuse it, to acknowledge reality or deny it—shape their immediate character and eternal destiny. No one is exempt from these decisions, everyone must either progress or regress; no one is spiritually neutral. Thomas Howard assessed the book's events: "The title tells us what it is all about. Someone is going to hell. But there is an ascent also. The path splits. The two main characters go in opposite directions, the one towards solitude, warmth, ennui, and oblivion; and the other towards co-inherence, joy, fullness, and liberty" (Howard 249). The character who is descending is Wentworth, a middle-aged military historian who begins to make a habit of dismissing any fact that is inconvenient to him, either in his profession or his daily life. The one who ascends is Pauline Anstruther, who "has a trick," as she describes it, of meeting an exact likeness of herself in the street (Williams 96). The distant appearances of this double leave her paralyzed with a "black panic," her initiative bound. The playwright Peter Stanhope, and Pauline's grandmother Margaret, suggest to her that good, like the doppelgänger, is terrifying. Stanhope later introduces Pauline to the doctrine of substituted love, and takes over her burden of fear, freeing her to begin her ascent.

The stumbling block that threatens to prevent these characters from ascending is a fear of loss, fear of relinquishing the self. When Margaret Anstruther is dreaming about the ghostly life of the Hill, Williams writes of one of the ghosts, "His enmity to man and heaven was only his yearning to enter one (heaven) without loss" (Williams 70). Wentworth's descent is precipitated by his refusal to accept any facet of reality that contradicts his preferences, or would require selflessness of him. He furthers his intellectual debate with a fellow-historian, Aston Moffat, by twisting the factual evidence, "preferring strange meanings and awkward constructions . . . [and] manipulating words" (Williams 39). He "refused all joy of facts, having for long refused all unselfish agony of facts" (Williams 81). Wentworth has been vigorously refusing loss for so long, that he cannot even bear to lose something he

didn't have in the first place. He feels an attraction to Adela Hunt, one of the young people who attend his weekly soirees, but his preference is purely selfish—he wishes Adela to flatter him, respect him, and show him deference. He becomes obsessed with her only after she demonstrably prefers Hugh Prescott's company. One of his final decisions to descend, his last small refusal of an invitation to participate in the joy of reality, comes when he learns of his historical rival's knighthood:

> There was presented to him at once and clearly an opportunity for joy—casual, accidental joy, but joy. If he could not manage joy, at least he might have managed the intention of joy, or (if that also were too much) an effort toward the intention of joy. The infinity of grace could have been contented and invoked by a mere mental refusal of anything but such an effort. He knew his duty—he was no fool—he knew that the fantastic recognition would please and amuse the innocent soul of Sir Aston, not so much for himself as in some unselfish way for the honour of history. Such honours meant nothing, but they were part of the absurd dance of the world, and to be enjoyed as such. Wentworth knew he could share that pleasure. He could enjoy; at least he could refuse not to enjoy. He could refuse and reject damnation.
>
> With a perfectly clear, if instantaneous, knowledge of what he did, he rejected joy instead. He instantaneously preferred anger, and at once it came; he invoked envy, and it obliged him. . . . He knew that his rival had not only succeeded, but succeeded at his own expense; what chance was there of another historical knighthood for years? Till that moment he had never thought of such a thing. The possibility had been created and withdrawn simultaneously, leaving the present fact to mock him. The other possibility—of joy in that present fact—receded as fast. He had determined, then and for ever, for ever, for ever, that he would hate the fact, and therefore facts (Williams 80-81).

In contrast to Wentworth, who is given opportunities for joy and spiritual growth, but consistently refuses them, is Aston Moffat, who was a "pure scholar, a holy and beautiful soul who would have sacrificed reputation, income, and life, if necessary, for the discovery of one fact" (Williams 38). Moffat had "determined his nature" long ago, like the residents of Battle Hill, who are creating or molding their characters with their daily decisions, choosing joy and self-submission, or demanding self-importance. Margaret Anstruther, too, fears loss; as she approaches death, she fears the relinquishing of her living identity, and the tremendous burden of knowledge that she would bear after moving into her next relation to the spiritual world. But when in her vision she rejected that fear and assented to the approaching prospect of death, she was returned to her familiar life: "it was as if, having renounced it, it was restored to her" (Williams 73). Margaret's vision suggests what the other characters will discover: that "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39).

Wentworth's demand that the self be all-important sends him into a terrible decline, a descent toward hell, which Howard describes as solitude, warmth, ennui, and oblivion. When the self is central, there is nothing else, and the self becomes nothingness. Wentworth's determination to lose nothing of himself, to submit no possible selfish interest to the overriding joy of reality, isolated him from the rest of humanity, and sealed his descent into hell. Wentworth briefly realized that the danger of what he was doing: "A remnant of intelligence cried to him that this was the road of mania, and self-indulgence leading to mania" (Williams 50), but he preferred to deceive himself, and intentionally continue his descent. His opportunities for reversal were many, but they were not infinite. At last, he responds to his final dilemma with self-focus, and he loses the power of consecutive thought (Williams 219). He withdraws into himself, and finds, beyond madness, absolute nothingness.

The notion that joy, gladness, and spiritual growth, can only be found in what is—in facts—is central. If Wentworth, or any other character, demands what he wants over what is, he is refusing joy, because reality is joy. How is it possible to relinquish what the individual wants and by so doing receive joy? Williams describes the reality that is wholly good and yet fearfully unfamiliar as a "terrible good." Stanhope discloses the idea of a terrible good to Pauline:

> "When I say terribly . . . I mean full of terror. A dreadful goodness."
>
> "And if things are terrifying," Pauline put in, "can they be good?"
>
> "Yes, surely," he said, with more energy. "Are our tremors to measure the Omnipotence?" (Williams 16-17)

God ordains the terrible good, the content of reality. The individual must submit their desires to God's sovereign plan—to do otherwise (to demand one's own plan) would place the person in a wrong relationship to God. And as Margaret and later, Pauline, found, God authored their desires as well as reality, and when they

submitted themselves to the terrible good, their desires were fulfilled.

Pauline is terrified of what will happen if she encounters her doppelgänger at close range. "She feared to be drawn [into her other self], to be lost or not to be lost" (Williams 59). But as Stanhope confronts her with the concept of a "terrible good," she recognizes what her double is: it is her future self, surrendered to God's will, ascending and growing spiritually, and she contemplates embracing the terrible good. The doppelgänger is Pauline herself, and yet not her; what aspect of herself must she give up in order to accept the terrible good? Her identity itself? Williams describes the doppelgänger as "her manifested joy," a call to the fuller life promised by Christ. But while she feared what she must give up of herself as a loss, she could not attain the fuller life—could not meet her other self. Williams uses the word joy synonymously with reality, and facts. Pauline's doppelgänger was "her manifested joy;" it was in fact her real self, her future self, submitted to the terrible good and ascending. Pauline was afraid of suffering and loss if she met her doppelgänger, but suffering is reality, and reality is love and joy. Whatever is, is joy. Because suffering is part of the nature of reality, it is sanctified by joy. This is what Stanhope meant when he said that the good was terrible, not the terror good. In Williams's cohesive scheme of reality, joy and suffering are not mutually exclusive, but identical; suffering is subsumed in the perfect truth and reality that God designs.

While Pauline feared the doppelgänger, she *could not* meet it; it always turned away because she rejected it. She dreamt and feared that it was pursuing her, but it was always coming to meet her, offering her an opportunity, and when she feared and rejected it, it turned away or disappeared. Each time the doppelgänger confronted her, it was an opportunity for spiritual growth, what Oswald Chambers describes as a "crisis": "Suppose God has brought you up to a crisis and you nearly go through but not quite, He will engineer the crisis again" (Chambers, August 13). Pauline's burden of fear prevented her from meeting the doppelgänger and continuing her ascent, until the burden of fear was removed. Clearly, the burden, like the doppelgänger, is Pauline's alone. But Peter Stanhope demonstrates the love of Christ in Pauline's life by contracting to bear the burden for her. "When you leave here you'll think to yourself that I've taken this particular trouble over instead of you. And I will give myself to it. I'll think of what comes to you, and imagine it, and know it, and be afraid of it. And then, you see, you won't" (Williams 97).

The doctrine of substituted love is the crux of the joy that participates in and defines reality and facts. We cannot save ourselves, so Christ saves us. We cannot bear the burden of suffering, so we bear one another's. Stanhope takes over Pauline's burden of fear, freeing her of its crippling paralysis. And Pauline discovers, with infinite joy, that she had borne the burden of fear all her life, on behalf of her ancestor John Struther, who was martyred four centuries before. He prayed for deliverance from the fear of the martyring fire, and Pauline's doppelgänger, her free and joyous self, accepted it from him, giving him her joy. As Pauline discovers that "she had lived without joy that he might die in joy" (Williams 171), her joy is fully restored, and she joins with her doppelgänger in one complete entity. "It had been her incapacity for joy, nothing else, that had till now turned the vision of herself aside; her incapacity for joy had admitted fear, and fear had imposed separation. She knew now that all acts of love are the measure of capacity for joy; its measure and its preparation, whether the joy comes or delays" (Williams 171).

Pauline's fear of the "terrible good" paralyzes her, until Stanhope contracts to bear her burden for her—he will be afraid on her behalf, making her free. Margaret Anstruther, moving in a vision beyond the boundaries of the living world, shows love to the spirit of a workman, freeing him to respond to the love of God. Pauline was able to apply the doctrine of substituted love by bearing the burden of John Struther four centuries after his death. "I have seen the salvation of my God," John Struther cried, and the salvation came through co-inherence. Williams expanded the connotations of co-inherence to include God's transcendent ability to unify every aspect of his creation. "[He] uses the term to speak of humanity's union with Adam in the Fall, with Christ in His reconciling act upon the Cross, and the unity of the Church" (Hynson). In *Descent Into Hell*, co-inherence unites the community of saints, enabling them to bear one another's burdens and participate in the joy of reality. Pauline's ascension to wholeness, and her participation in the process of substituted love, are in striking contrast to the nothingness that envelopes Wentworth when he withdraws from the co-inherent fabric of relationships. Each person in the community of the saints must relinquish their burden, and bear that of another. This application of co-inherence sanctifies suffering, lightening the individual's load, and drawing all of reality—both gladness and distress—under the canopy of a majestic, "terrible good." Oswald Chambers describes the peace and freedom that come with the terrible good:

> "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Where do the saints get their joy from? If we did not know some saints, we would say—"Oh, he, or she, has nothing to bear." Lift the veil. The fact that the peace and the light and the joy of God are there is proof that the burden is there too. The burden God places squeezes the grapes and out comes the wine; most of us see the wine only. No power on earth or in hell can conquer the Spirit of God in a human

> spirit, it is an inner unconquerableness.—Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, April 14

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# Rooms as Cultural Approaches

Katie Garber

*That Hideous Strength* might fit into a category I would label "pre-dystopian" literature—not being written before other dystopian works, but being a record of C.S. Lewis's fictionalized, satirical account of a future world that stands on the brink of entering a dystopian future. It is "pre-dystopian" because it tells of the human struggle which occurs in deciding whether humanity will enter one of its worst imaginable ends.

The canon of dystopian fiction written in the decades around 1945 (the publishing date of *That Hideous Strength*) is exemplified by Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*. Lewis's ideas about the cause of a dark future differ not only in the fact that he acknowledges spiritual forces behind these human events, but also in the avenue through which he fears society will be spoiled. Lewis, the professor of English, looks mainly to art and culture as that culpable vein.

Huxley had assumed that the likely evils that would occur if society did not change certain trends would lie mostly along the lines of scientific advances in relation to embracing pleasure and total, mindless gratification. The government of *Brave New World* applies and enforces what seems to be scientific human "progress" and leaves its citizens mentally numb. Science has taken away pain and struggle, leaving any meaningful art and culture as simply dispensable non-issues. Orwell also presented an artless society, but his powerful government has taken control through the use of the military, retaining power through fear, organization, and propaganda.

Although Lewis's novel does include frightful images of scientists attempting to force evolutionary progress onto humankind, the science is not the main issue. The ideas behind their goals are certainly dangerous, but the scientists are only fooled by those working for the demonic forces into believing that they have succeeded in their experiments with a prototype for the immortal, ubiquitous, inorganic human. Therefore real scientific advances were not necessary, in Lewis's mind, as they were for Huxley. A strong, threatening government also had little influence on the events in *That Hideous Strength*, beyond the intimidated government's compliance with the N.I.C.E. plans. Transparent political goals were not necessary, for the work was underground, drawing members slowly together, initiating them into the pseudo-science run by demonic forces which hoped to eventually eradicate the rest of the population. Authoritarian governmental structures, based solely on the thirst for power, which Orwell feared as the cause of dystopia, did not bring Lewis the greatest fear. Lewis was warning instead against the infiltration of ideas into a generation with little remaining moral foundation, and with few assumed values that the skeptics (and artists) had left unquestioned. The hyperbolic goals of Lewis's dystopian villains seem to be mostly impractical images which display to cultural progressives what their artistic and scientific "ideas" would look like if actually put into practice. In the novel's preface, Lewis writes: "This is a 'tall story' about devilry, though it has behind it a serious 'point' which I have tried to make in my *Abolition of Man*," a non-fiction work that he had published in 1943, dealing with issues of moral education.

If *That Hideous Strength* is a picture of good vs. evil within the contemporary culture that Lewis chastises in *The Abolition of Man*, I would argue that Lewis goes one further step into image-making by providing the two approaches to culture (the "good" approach and the "bad" approach) with their own uniquely conceived specialized room that holds their essential cultural ideal in one well-packaged design. The struggle between good and evil in this novel, then, may be understood in compact form by looking closely at the Blue Room vs. the Objectivity Room.

The Blue Room is located in The Manor at St. Anne's and is the room in which Ransom, the Director, currently lives and where he communicates with the

eldils—or angels. It is the spiritual center of The Manor, being the most concentrated example of the good ideals they hold. The Objectivity Room is located in Belbury and serves a specific function other than residence: it is the final stage of training, or mind-alteration, for members of the N.I.C.E. who are chosen to enter the inner circle of devotion to the macrobes—or demons.

As the most general and obvious difference, the Blue Room is based on what C.S. Lewis considers "natural" and right, and the Objectivity Room is entirely "unnatural" and coercive. Defining which cultural system is the natural and which is the deviant stands at the base of Lewis's approach to modern cultural issues. Have traditional approaches to reality been illusions which contemporary society has overcome? Or has contemporary society's "progress" been an illusion which only takes it further from understanding reality? According to Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man*, explanations of the spiritual reality that lay behind nature came under scrutiny once scientific discoveries made traditional religious and spiritual ideas seem primitive. Lewis chooses the label the "Tao" for those basic values which must be assumed and cannot be "questioned" (for there can be no other basis on which to judge them). In general, the Tao, throughout history, has been accepted in its various forms by various cultures. The assumption that there is some sort of order and harmony in the universe, which is exemplified in those human societies following the Tao's tenets, has more recently been supplanted by a culture driven towards what it perceives as independence from tradition and superstition. Cultures which had attempted to harmonize with the absolute truths behind nature and reality have more recently become cultures which deny any need to integrate with an absolute order, for they assume that no order exists.

The Blue Room in Lewis's novel, however, is a contemporary picture of a community acknowledging that higher order. Jane Studdock first enters the room as an unbeliever; it is clear that fear and circumstance bring her to this household at St. Anne's, not a desire to find Truth. In fact, she cannot at first comprehend the structure of life within this house, as she is not yet convinced of the moral assumptions which lead to the form that this community takes. The most obvious, if most controversial, example is their view of marriage. Mother Dimble, coming from a previous generation, cannot even understand why modern women would question their "duties" to their husbands, for these roles should come naturally. Although she basically attributes this to instinct, her beliefs are more likely the results of what Lewis would argue is a proper upbringing and education based on the Tao. On the other hand, the Director has explanations and rational arguments for these same traditional gender roles in marriage; however, his arguments are based on the humble acceptance of the foundational principles given by his spiritual authorities. Of course, many who accept the idea of the Tao itself may not see traditional gender roles as part of this foundational value system, but Lewis uses this issue as a vivid picture of how his idea of what is natural and right would be lived out in a likeminded group of people.

Jane is initiated into this common understanding when she speaks with the Director in the Blue Room. The approach to enlightenment within this room is neither coercive nor manipulative; it is honest and understanding. The Director tells her bluntly, for example, that obedience is necessary and that "equality is not the deepest thing" (148), both very jarring ideas to a modern woman. He also recognizes that her mindset is not exactly her fault. "They never warned you. No one has ever told you . . ." (148), he says. He follows up this discussion about her role in marriage with a demonstration based in nature. After dropping some crumbs on the floor, they watch as mice run in to appropriately eat the crumbs. The Director displays through an everyday experience the fact that harmony exists in the world and that it is a human duty to make "adjustments" (149) if need be in order to enter into the "dance" of nature, as he calls it. Husband and wife must play their part in the higher order, just as man and mouse must play certain roles if they wish to avoid turmoil. In the Blue Room, then, human beings are first honestly educated about the Tao, which is the system upon which the natural world was created, and are second invited to join in on the dance of all nature which can only occur when humans freely choose to join in their place.

In contrast, the Objectivity Room attempts to disrupt this order through coercive means. After Mark has spent some time discovering deeper layers within the N.I.C.E. organization, coming closer to finding its real hidden purposes, he faces the final initiation into its Inner Circle; this last step is meant to occur within the Objectivity Room. To become a member of the "family," as Withers calls the group at the core of N.I.C.E.'s goals, the individual must enter into a family of an entirely different sort than that imagined by those at St. Anne's. This is also a family which is more "like a single personality" (120). Ransom's explication of the ideal family is also unified like a single personality, and yet it is based on the opposite of equality, focusing instead on the give and take of the various unique elements. Conversely, the "single personality" desired as an ideal community at the N.I.C.E. is one in which all subjectivity and uniqueness is erased; in other words, the humans in this family must cease to be human. Frost explains that "a circle bound together by subjective feelings of mutual confidence and liking would be useless" (255) for their purposes.

To achieve this state in its members, the N.I.C.E. must manipulate their minds through blatantly unnatural means. Within the Objectivity Room, human beings lose that which makes them human. For example, a

series of dots cover the ceiling. The subject looking at the ceiling believes that they are randomly placed, then begins to see a possible pattern, but realizes that there is no pattern, even though it continually seems that one must exist. Eventually the subject would become numb to this disturbing effect. These sorts of elements in the room draw out into the light those tendencies for unification and harmony which the community at St. Anne's celebrates; but they only bring them out in order to make them so obviously absurd compared to the alternate reality they have created as the basis of this room. On a cultural level, this technique would actually resemble a postmodern deconstruction of metanarratives. Through very unnatural methods which break away from the traditions of art as a means of expressing harmony and trying to understand reality, art has taken on the role of emphasizing that society's previous attempts to construct a unifying metanarrative of any sort is entirely contrived and therefore useless. The false impression of harmony, it says, has hindered the progression of mankind towards objective truth—which is admittedly difficult to handle for any who have not erased their human subjectivity and sensitivities. Therefore, they must become numb to those things which will not conform to previous assumptions about harmony in the natural order, and must also become numb to those things which offend their sense of decency—which, to the progressive mind, is clearly based on contrived human constructs. This desensitization is the function of the visual art within the Objectivity Room.

This artwork is of the sort produced by the Dada and Surrealist movements. It is a purposefully disturbing art, and it glorifies the human subconscious as its source—looking within the human mind for understanding, rather than looking outside towards nature and a higher spiritual realm. Within the Objectivity Room it functions as an agent for numbing the moral sensibilities, and therefore we can assume that Lewis viewed such art as similarly detrimental to society. By displacing this art from intellectual circles revered by culture into a room used for mental manipulation by a distinctly abhorrent organization, these contemporary forms of art and those who praise them become by implication the villains of our culture.

While Jane is choosing to learn and to humbly accept the principles which run the very human and meaningful culture of the company at St. Anne's, Mark is being coerced into conforming to inhuman objectivity. Jane experiences the rebirth of her assumptions about morality most significantly within the Blue Room, interacting with those people who can lead her to knowledge of truth and knowledge of the spiritual powers behind this truth. Hers is a very personal transformation, based on free choice, honesty, and humility. On the other hand, those who are trying to conform Mark's mind are allowing the Objectivity Room to effect him in isolation, apart from any true human connections. He is essentially forced into this setting where they mean to kill any assumptions about morality which had remained from his upbringing.

In providing his readers the images of these two rooms, Lewis gives us two small packages that can be carried around, which represent the opposing cultures human beings then (and now) face. Although displaced into a science fiction novel, they are the options between which his contemporaries may choose: as described in *The Abolition of Man*, these are the way of the Tao vs. the way of its modern dissenters. As described in *That Hideous Strength*, these are the Blue Room and the Objectivity Room.

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# The Style and Diction of *Till We Have Faces*: Medieval and Renaissance Undertones

Larry E. Fink

This exploration began with a single word noticed in a happy coincidence. I was reading *Till We Have Faces* with my C.S. Lewis class and teaching an independent study on the Medieval period when I ran across the word "swap" in the novel and in Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*. The sense of the word in each work is identical; it is a sword stroke used to decapitate or dismember. This got me to wondering if Lewis used other Middle English words with their Middle English senses, and eventually, whether the novel might have other medieval qualities. The process of rereading the novel with close attention to its diction, and alertness for medieval elements, has provided new insights for me as a student and teacher of Lewis. When looking closely for one thing, we notice other items—items we are not looking for. In addition to some of the same diction, I found similarities in the creation, purpose, setting, tone and narrative style of *Till We Have Faces* and certain Medieval and Renaissance works.

*Till We Have Faces* has a Chaucerian genesis, according to Lewis's own description of Chaucer's work; as Chaucer used Boccacio, Lewis used the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Lewis wrote that Chaucer's "procedure is, if not universal, at any rate normal, medieval procedure. The characteristic activity of the medieval—perhaps especially the Middle English—author is precisely 'touching up' something that was already there" (Genesis 37). Lewis "touches up" the myth by adding the crucial plot element—". . . making Psyche's palace invisible to normal, mortal eyes . . ." (Lewis, "Note" Till 313). On the other hand, he observes that medieval writers

> are so rebelliously and insistently original that they can hardly reproduce a page of an older work without transforming it by their own intensely visual and emotional imagination, turning the abstract into the concrete, quickening the static into turbulent movement, flooding whatever was colourless with scarlet and gold. (Genesis 37-8)

The detailed, nearly-naturalistic description in *Till We Have Faces* is interesting in light of this comment. For instance, Lewis's blunt treatment of sexual matters finds precedence in Chaucer. Of Chaucer Lewis writes, "It is a lesson worth learning, how Chaucer can so triumphantly celebrate the flesh without becoming delirious like Rossetti or pornographic like Ovid. The secret lies, I think, in his *concreteness*." [Lewis's emphasis] (Allegory 196). While Lewis does not exactly celebrate the flesh in this novel, his vivid details and stark diction in *Till We Have Faces* show that he learned well the lesson of concreteness.

*Till We Have Faces* could also be called Chaucerian in its theme and purpose. According to Lewis, Chaucer's genius is shown in his "psychology of love" (Allegory 168). Chaucer—in *Troilus*—". . . recalls the 'younge freshe folkes' of his audience from human to Divine love: recalls them 'home,' as he significantly says" (Allegory 179). Few writers have done more than Lewis to teach the fine distinctions between the types of love and the differences between genuine and counterfeit loves, *Till We Have Faces* being of primary importance in this teaching.

Lewis's setting—the kingdom of Glome—is a barbarian country located somewhere to the north of Greece. Greek culture and values are represented by Lysias, "The Fox," and his philosophy, stoicism. However, the atmosphere of the kingdom has a medieval feel, complete with kings, knightly lords, beautiful princesses, step mothers, drunken feasts, chess games, and never-ending church-state politics. The list continues with sword play, single combat determining the fate of kingdoms, the succession of monarchs, political marriages, conniving servants, and superstitious peasants. Lewis notes that "Chaucer . . . reverences knighthood" (Allegory 158). So, clearly,

does Lewis if we consider his memorable character, Lord Bardia, Captain of the King's Guard and, later, trusted counselor to Queen Orual.

Lewis's tone in this book is unique among his fiction. George Musacchio writes, it "stands off to itself in Lewis's canon" (145). One of the novel's other close readers, Peter Schakel, notes that "a few readers are put off by the sentence structure and word choice." Schakel describes these features as

> part of the total fiction Lewis is creating. We are to imagine not Lewis writing this in the twentieth century, but the character Orual writing it, more than 2,200 years ago. And we are to imagine she is writing it in Greek, which is a second language for her, and a language for conducting business and legal matters, thus more formal and less flowing for her than if she were writing in her native language. To give some sense that one is reading an ancient document, in Greek, Lewis slips into a slightly stiff, artificial tone. (6-7)

Schakel goes on to discuss the narrator's unreliability, concluding that the book "requires, then, an adult level of reading . . . but it will yield, therefore, adult-level understandings of Lewis, of life, and of oneself" (8).

One of the most obvious stylistic similarities between *Till We Have Faces* and a Chaucerian tale is the inseparability of the narrator from the content. Only the Wife of Bath could tell her tale—her Prologue, anyway; and *only* the Miller *would* tell his tale. Only Orual could tell her tale, complete with her near-total blindness to self in Part One. Lewis's choice of a female first person narrator is part of what sets the book apart from the rest of his fiction. His other first-person narrations could—we can imagine—have been written in the third person, with the exception of *Screwtape;* however, its epistolary form overrides the author's choice of point of view. The Ransom books feature Lewis himself as narrator, which adds a bit of verisimilitude, but we would lose little more than the wonderful story of the reader who wrote to Lewis, wanting to meet Professor Ransom, were it told well from a third person point of view.

After looking closely at Lewis's diction we can make a few broad generalizations. Generalization one: his diction in this novel makes it the most challenging fiction he produced. It is likely that almost any reader will find a word that is new to him in this book. Generalization two: despite his successful effecting of a formal and ancient tone for the work as a whole, a certain Britishness creeps in by way of idioms and individual words. Generalization three: Lewis's intimacy with medieval and renaissance literature breaks out, consciously or unconsciously, in his word choice. He uses enough words in common with Chaucer and Shakespeare to suggest the following: in his attempt to evoke a sense of the ancient past for readers of English, Lewis chose words that for most readers suggest a very remote age, though they are words very familiar to Lewis the scholar. This convention is similar to that used in many films based on the Bible or classical mythology; that is, employing Shakespearean-style actors with British accents to play Hebrew patriarchs or Olympian gods. It makes no sense logically, but probably adds a certain weightiness and dignity, especially for many American viewers.

In addition to the creation, purpose, setting, tone, narrator, and diction, there are three other small reminders of the medieval world in this book. First, the manners and language in, for instance, the serving of a drink of water—or is it wine?—between Psyche and Orual. It suggests the tone of courtly love conversations:

> She jumped up, went a little way off, and came back, carrying something; the little cool, dark berries of the Mountains, in a green leaf. "Eat," she said. "Is it not food fit for the gods?"
>
> "Nothing sweeter," said I. And indeed I was both hungry and thirsty enough by now, for it was noon or later. "But oh, Psyche, tell me how—"
>
> "Wait!" said she. "After the banquet, the wine." Close beside us a little silvery trickle came out from among the stones mossed cushion-soft. She held her two hands under it till they were filled and raised them to my lips.
>
> "Have you ever tasted a nobler wine?" she said. "Or in a fairer cup?"
>
> "It is indeed a good drink," said I. "But the cup is better. It is the cup I love best in the world."
>
> "Then it is yours, Sister." She said it with such a pretty air of courtesy, like a queen and the hostess giving gifts, that the tears came into my eyes again. (104)

A second reminder or echo of the medieval world is Orual's describing "the gods' old tricks; [how they] blow the bubble up big before [they] prick it" (222). This sounds much like Boethius's description of Fortune's treatment of mortals in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the work that not only permeates Medieval literature more widely that any but the Bible itself, but also a work Chaucer translated into Middle English and that Lewis alludes to repeatedly in his non-fiction. The third reminder is the charming description of the

Queen's entourage on their "progress" to see new lands. It sounds very like a group of pilgrims making their way across country; the Queen writes:

> The people I had with me were all young and took great pleasure in their travels, and the journey itself had by now linked us all together—all burned brown, and with a world of hope, cares, jests, and knowledge, all sprung up since we left home and shared among us. (239)

Before concluding, I offer a bit of parenthetical speculation; I think I detect an autobiographical thread in this tapestry-like novel. The depth of character development and the pain of self knowledge embodied in Orual amaze the reader. We would ask Lewis, "From what source did you draw such pathology, such distorted ideas about love?" And he might answer as he did about the production of *The Screwtape Letters*: "'My heart'—I need no other's—showeth me the wickedness of the ungodly'" ("Preface" xiii). Part One of the novel is Orual's complaint (3), her accusation of the gods. It is her cherished grievance about how she thinks she was mistreated. (Part Two, the account of her vision, her realization of her real nature of what she called her love for psyche.) Lewis wrote about grievances and spiritual blindness in the essay, "The Seeing Eye." He says all one has to do to avoid seeing God is to "Avoid silence, avoid solitude, avoid any train of thought that leads off the beaten track. Concentrate on money, sex, status, health, and (above all) on your own grievances" (169). Lewis may have been drawing from personal experience about the blinding power of dwelling on one's grievances to produce the character Orual. He certainly had grievances—with God for not healing his mother, with his father's difficult personality—to name two more significant issues in his life. He was blind to God's love for many years. And after his conversion, he still experienced his share of grievances—with the failure of Oxford to fully recognize his contributions, for instance. I doubt he preferred commuting to Cambridge for years, spending only weekends and holidays at "The Kilns." But as I said, this is mere speculation and not my primary focus.

In conclusion, Lewis was not trying to write a Canterbury Tale; however, an examination of the diction in the following list reveals *Till We Have Faces* as a medieval- and, often, renaissance-flavored work. Such an examination yields insights about the creation of Lewis's most fully developed character, his style, and his intimacy with medieval and renaissance literature.

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## Interesting Diction in C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*: Briticisms, Archaisms, Idioms, Etc.

The numbers following each word are page numbers from Eerdmans 1966 edition of *Till We Have Faces*. The word or phrase that follows denotes the sense of the word in the context of Lewis's sentence.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| byre | 6 | barn |
| stale | 7 | animal urine *The Tempest* IV i |
| salt bitch | 26 | a bitch in heat |
| chaplet | 31 | wreath or garland *Knight's Tale, A MidSummer Night's Dream* II, i |
| paps | 42 | nipples |
| bodkin | 53 | ME boydekin *Reeve's Tale; Hamlet* III, i |
| trull | 55 | female prostitute |
| quean | 55 | trollop, concubine *Manciple's Tale* |
| trice | 55 | pull, hoist *Monk's Tale* |
| faugh | 57 | exclamation of disgust |
| lass | 57 | ME las |
| play the man | 59 | idiom |
| swap | 65 | sword stroke (as in "swap off" a limb or head) *Second Nun's Tale* |
| betweenwhiles | 83 | |
| mountebank | 84 | charlatan |
| befall | 86 | to happen |
| slug abed | 88 | v. to be lazy cp "fresh abed" in *Wife of Bath's Tale* |
| make free with | 90 | idiom |
| by your favor | 91 | |
| That's very well thought of, Lady. | 92 | That's a good idea. |
| doxy | 97 | promiscuous woman *The Winter's Tale* IV, iii |
| faugh | 124 | exclamation of disgust |
| I make so free | 131 | idiom |
| ferly | 134, 142 | n. a wonder or marvel, Burns "To a Louse"<br>adj. extraordinary, strange *Reeve's Tale* |
| "I was so dashed . . ." | 137 | to be confounded, abashed |
| beard to beard | 138 | face to face *Macbeth V, v* |
| starveling | 142 | adj. starving |
| graveled | 155 | perplexed |
| salt villain | 160 | Ben Jonson *Every Man Out of His Humor* |
| doxies | 163 | promiscuous women *The Winter's Tale* IV, iii |
| mastery | 165 | ME maistry—superiority, art—common in Chaucer;<br>maistrie in Milton, *Paradise Lost* II, 900 |
| oath on edge | 166 | cp *Hamlet* I v 146, 149 |
| made little odds | 171 | idiom |
| rummage | 173 | n., confusion |
| trumped up foolery | 173 | |
| bemire | 174 | to soil with mud |
| corrupt | 175 | verb, become infected, *Merchant's Tale* |
| frippery | 181 | tawdry finery *The Tempest* IV, i |
| savoury | 182 | pleasurable (erotic) cp *Miller's Tale* (Absolom's kiss in the dark) |
| possets | 182 | spiced drink, hot sweetened milk curdled with wine *Hamlet* I, V |
| bawdy (n.) | 182 | |
| had the name of | | had the reputation of |
| a weaponed man | 186 | not a eunuch |
| setting Glome by the ears | 187 | idiom |
| played the fool to admiration | 192 | acted unwisely |
| chary | 195 | very cautious |
| sharps | 200, 213 | sharp swords *Romeo & Juliet* III, v |
| taper | 201 | candle |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| tunnies | 208 | tuna |
| chain shirt | 213 | chain mail shirt |
| hauberk | 214 | long chain mail tunic *Knight's Tale* |
| "Queen's Lantern" | 215 | counselor to the queen |
| let the office sleep | 215 | deactivate |
| huzzaing | 217 | to shout huzza, to cheer |
| cross-patch | 218 | grouchy person |
| blackguardly | 219 | cowardly, unprincipled |
| hoplite | 219 | armed Greek foot soldier |
| daffing | 223 | flirting cp. *Much Ado About Nothing* V,i |
| faugh | 223 | exclamation of disgust |
| trenchers | 230 | wooden or bread "plates" (dishes) *Taming of the Shrew* IV, i |
| sluts | 230 | *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* |
| doves eyes they've made at one another | 233 | |
| pother | 233 | commotion, disturbance *King Lear III, ii; Coriolanus* II, i |
| byres | 237 | barns |
| go on a progress | 237 | take a trip |
| a plump of spears | 237 | a group of spearmen Sir Walter Scott |
| cockered and cosseted | 248 | spoiled and pampered |
| staunching | | checking flow of blood ME stanchen *Boece* |
| Blindman's buff | 249 | 19th-century parlor game |
| slug abed | 257 | v. to be lazy cp fresh abed *Wife of Bath's Tale* |
| dugs | 258 | breasts |
| beat the breast | 259 | idiom |
| hedgehog skins | 259 | reportedly used by extreme Medieval ascetics to mortify the flesh |
| in court fashion | 259 | conforming to court conventions |
| housewifely | 260 | domestic |
| doxy | 264 | promiscuous woman *The Winter's Tale* IV, iii |
| thrift | 265 | economics, money-saving<br>cp *Hamlet* I, ii, 174-183; III, ii, 57-62; III, ii, 182-5 |
| cock chafer-like | 265 | cockchafer, a European beetle destructive to plants |
| within an ace | 267 | on the verge of, very near to |
| towsing of girls | 269 | rumpling [?] Dryden, Burns; tawsing (?) To whip with a tawes—a leather strap used to punish Scottish school children |
| slut | 269 | promiscuous woman |
| slug abed | 275 | v. to be lazy cp fresh abed *Wife of Bath's Tale* |
| buff-naked | 278 | completely naked |
| dooms | 285 | judgments *Clerk's Tale, Boece* |
| chit of a girl | 291 | child* |
| cat-foot rogue | 292 | thief |
| battened | 296 | to become fat *Hamlet* III, iv; *Coriolanus* IV, v |
| fie | 303 | interjection expressing disapproval ME fi |

*Compare to Lewis's sentence, "'A chit of a girl—a whipper-snapper of a boy—being shown things that are hidden from their elders?'" in his chapter titled "Affection" in *The Four Loves*.

# Charles Williams: Priest of the Co-inherence

Susan Wendling

*"I'm a little conscious myself of a certain new detachment. What you might call my 'field of operations' has widened, but it's more markedly remote. I mean that I'm even more of a . . . prophet? priest? Something—more of a Voice and less of a man . . ."*
*(Letter to his wife dated 17 Feb/45, three months before his death)*

Thank you all for joining me in this second session on Charles Williams. The first session presented Charles Williams as a "prophet of glory," outlining the biographical highlights of his life, the impact of his charismatic personality on his friends, and his spiritual ideals. Although my earlier paper defined his doctrine of the Co-Inherence, explaining briefly that this doctrine entails "romantic theology" with its emphasis on substitution and exchange, this paper will seek to illustrate more deeply what Williams actually meant by these as a real Way of life, to be lived out concretely in a conscious awareness of Love-in-God.

At the close of my last presentation, I mentioned that during the 1920's and early 1930's CW wrote three short plays for his colleagues to act in at Amen House where he worked at the Oxford University Press. A colleague of CW's, Gerry Hopkins, later wrote that for Williams, "the City of God in which he never ceased to dwell, contained Amen House as its noblest human monument, and all who lived and worked within it were citizens with him."[1] Well, that extension of Williams's personal mythic universe to encompass his colleagues at work grew even deeper in 1939. You of course remember that 1939 was the year that CW came up to Oxford and joined Lewis's literary gathering of friends. His biographer, Alice Mary Hadfield relates that at this time too, "Charles began to agree to his friends' pressure to form an Order concerned with his ideas of co-inherence, substitution and exchange—a step he had refused for three years."[2] He wrote out a set of principles by which "The Companions of the Co-Inherence" were to order their lives, and by that September they were "promulgated" among the "Household." His biographer spells these principles out exactly as CW wrote them down initially. Basically, the principles put forth creedal Christianity and emphasize that those "members" who are "in union with" Christ and His Mystical Body must likewise live lives of "substitution" and "exchange." This of necessity involves "bearing each other's burdens," acknowledging that the foundation for this is "the Divine Substitution of Messias," and, finally, associating themselves with four Feasts of the High Anglican Church.[3]

I find it fascinating that in 1941, in a newspaper review of a book on the origin of the Jesuits, Williams wrote even more knowingly and passionately about such an Order:

> . . . let us then keep our Order secret; let it not be organized but by that prudent ambition. It will have as many 'difficult and heroic feats' as Ignatius himself loved; it shall depend on less, as a Company, even than the Jesuits, for they did at least know each other; but we shall not, or only by holy Luck. Its derivation shall be from God through others; its meditation on those indirect derivations; its aim the propaganda everywhere of that sensitive and humble knowledge. It shall not be a social or

> religious movement but it shall be at the bottom of all in the sense that it is their true and only justification in mere fact . . . Secret and certain, its only history will be in the conversation of the Companions and in the slow stilling and deepening of their eyes.[4]

Conversations are ephemeral things, yet through the details of CW's known life and his passionate intensity shining in the "web of glory" that constitutes his body of literary work, we too can learn about the "Companions of the Co-Inherence" and perhaps even join with them in the secret citadel of our souls. If we dare, and are blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can even progress through the three levels of this "Company" as Williams describes in his poem, "The Founding of the Company," in his Arthurian cycle of poetry, *The Region of the Summer Stars*. Again, the new Company grows "as a token of love" and lives "only by conceded recollection, having no decision, no vote or admission." So, "at the first station, were those who lived by frankness of honourable exchange, labour in the kingdom, devotion in the Church, the need each had of other." Later in this poem, Williams tells us that "The Company's second mode bore farther the labour and fruition; it exchanged the proper self and wherever need was drew breath daily in another's place, according to the grace of the Spirit 'dying each other's life, living each other's death.' Terrible and lovely is the general substitution of souls. . . . none of the Company—in marriage, in the priesthood, in friendship, in all love—forgot in their own degree the decree of substitution." According to Williams, "Few—and that hardly—entered on the third station, where the full salvation of all souls is seen, and their co-inhering, as when the Trinity first made man in Their image, and now restored by the one adored substitution." Living with this large vision of verse, holding the image of *perichoresis*, "of separateness without separation," "The Company throve by love, by increase of peace, by the shyness of saving and being saved in others—the Christ-taunting and Christ-planting maxim which throughout Logres the excellent absurdity held."[5] In other words, at this third level are "those few slaves and lords, priests and mechanics, who are aware that the human interchanges are images of the reciprocal love among the Persons of the Trinity."[6]

I venture to guess that most of us here today have not meditated very deeply on how our ordinary, everyday "exchanges," whether in the intimacy of our marriage beds or in the commerce of public exchange of money and other transactions, are images of the reciprocal exchange of love among the Persons of what Anglo-Catholics call the Holy and Undivided Trinity! This mystical vision of Love-in-God IS "the web of the Glory," and Williams consistently pronounced it throughout his entire life as Fact. You will understand what is going on in his seven supernatural novels if you see his characters according to CW's idea of Co-inherence. For those who affirm the images of experience as part of the web of the Glory, and therefore "good," even though they may experience it as "terrible" at a given point in time, there is ultimately salvation and the joy of exchange and the bearing of burdens. The characters in his novels who deny "the actuality of the universe," have only self and chaos and illusion and ultimately damnation.

I confess that we lack the time to fully investigate the basic methods of "exchanged love" in this presentation. For those interested in pursuing these depths, let me recommend the best book on CW's thought, "The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams" by Mary McDermott Shideler. Shideler unpacks Williams's vision of Co-Inherence, noting that it involves three aspects. First, there is the use of the body as an index of love. Then, there is the development of the feeling intellect and of faith. Finally, there are the primary acts of love, seen in the bearing of burdens, sacrifice, and forgiveness.[7]

This first key to understanding Co-inherence, of seeing the Body as an "index" to love, with the flesh supporting all love, requires a little additional instruction, particularly since this concept is fundamentally "sacramental" and partakes of the Catholic religious imagination rather than the Protestant! In referring to David Tracy's book, "Analogical Imagination," Andrew Greeley notes in his book, "The Catholic Imagination," that "Catholics tend to accentuate the immanence of God, Protestants the transcendence of God."[8] So, as Greeley continues:

> When one says that God is love, meaning like human love only more powerful and passionate, one is using a metaphor. When one goes a step further and says that human love is an analogy for God, one says that there is a reality in God which human love is like and which in some fashion human love participates."[9]

If you are in a Catholic, Orthodox or Anglican church, then you undoubtedly recite one of the Creeds each Sunday, and state that you "believe in the resurrection of the body." God is the ultimate sacramentalist, if you will, creating us as having both bodies and souls. Further, he reveals Himself in the God-Man, Jesus, whose being is the dual nature in a fused Image of both the divine and human. Finally, as if to emphasize the sacramentalist nature of God as He is embodied in Christ Jesus, He teaches His followers to "feed on Him" via the Body and the Blood of the eucharistic Bread and Wine. These are fused images—sacraments—in which the physical elements mystically embody the spiritual reality of the presence of Christ as we "feed on Him in our hearts." As Shideler puts it, "When God took flesh and dwelt among us, . . . He demonstrated to all men

that the physical body—his and ours—is indeed the body of our salvation: not spirit dissociated from matter, not some alien substance, but the full humanity of man."[10] Williams actually makes a rather theologically profound and even mysterious declaration when he states, "It is in our bodies that the secrets exist."[11]

The romantic lover sees in the body of his beloved that "'the means of grace and the hope of glory' are in our bodies also, and the name of them is love."[12] Beatrice's flesh is "the physical Image of Christ, the physical vehicle of the Holy Ghost,"[13] as Shideler puts it, "because in its own right, it is holy. It shares the co-inherent nature of very love—which is what it means to be holy."[14] "Flesh knows what spirit knows, / but spirit knows it knows."[15]

This description of the body that Williams calls "romantic theology" implies the next aspect of the doctrine of Co-inherence, namely, that if "flesh knows what spirit knows," then the usual dualities of "body/mind" and "passion/intellect" are what Shideler calls "cognate functions, categories of one identity."[16] This is what Williams, borrowing from the poet Wordsworth, calls "the feeling intellect." As Shideler puts it so well, ". . . adoration requires a whole person. Neither passion alone nor intellect alone enables the whole person to participate fully in the complexity and delight of the co-inherence. . . . However, the feeling intellect . . . must have enrichment from the experiences of others . . ."[17] So we add another layer to our working definition of Williams's concept of co-inherence: just as human romantic love leads to physical union, so the feeling intellect requires the balance of mutual and passionate exchange intellectually. As Williams puts it in one of his novels, "The Place of the Lion," :

> . . . No mind was so good that it did not need another mind to counter and equal it, and to save it from conceit, and blindness and bigotry and folly. Only in such a balance could humility be found, humility which was a lucid speed to welcome lucidity whenever and wherever it presented itself.[18]

Knowledge, as well as being, depends upon exchange. By submitting one's personal experiences and ideas to the authority of others, a person is united with others in a web of what Williams calls, "reciprocal derivation" or mutuality. Beyond such intellectual assent to this web of mutual exchange lies not only the feeling intellect but also the life of faith. Shideler tells us that "hard thinking is necessary, and disciplined imagination, and rigorous translation of thought and imagery into action, before the feeling intellect can mature into the life of faith."[19] Williams is quite adamant on this, as he states in one of his biographies:

> "The intellect working in a world in which the Incarnation has happened is not obviously in the same position as the intellect working in a world in which the Incarnation has not happened. But it has to learn to operate on the new premises."[20]

For the remainder of this paper, I want to look at the third implication of Co-inherence, that of the actual practices that these "new premises" of Incarnational life involve. Shideler asks her readers whether they "believe in" the Incarnation of Love in Christ. All of us here today probably claim to be people of Christian faith who would respond, "well, of course, we believe in the Incarnation of God in Christ." Yet we need to be challenged by Williams's thinking on the actual *practice* of substituted love. How do we learn to practice the exchanges of co-inherent love, "under the Mercy" of Messias?

Again, there are three types of Christian actions involved in the practice of substituted love. They all involve spiritual choices leading to some sort of sacrifice, and often entail a very deeply mystical transaction, in a sort of concrete compact between two people. The three practices are 1) the bearing of burdens; 2) sacrifice; and 3) forgiveness. I will quickly mention how forgiveness and sacrifice are crucial to the practice of substituted love, according to Williams's incarnational theology, but then discuss in more detail the first practice, that of the bearing of burdens.

We all of us pray The Lord's Prayer, in which the mutuality of the principle of forgiveness is spelled out explicitly: "Forgive us our trespasses (sins) as we forgive those who trespass (sin) against us." Williams states in the Introduction to his treatise "The Forgiveness of Sins":

> . . . If there is God, if there is sin, if there is forgiveness, we must know it in order to live to him. If there are men, and if forgiveness is part of the interchanged life of men, then we must know it in order to live to and among them. Forgiveness, if it is at all a principle of that exchanged life, is certainly the deepest of all; if it is not, then the whole principle of interchange is false. . . . [21]

Early in this treatise Williams reminds us that at His incarnation, He became "Forgiveness in flesh; he lived the life of Forgiveness. This undoubted fact serves as a reminder that Forgiveness is an act and not a set of words. It is a thing to be *done*."[22] Later, he develops the principle that the active and passive modes of forgiveness were not to be separated; that they were identical. "To forgive and to be forgiven were one thing."[23] As for the Lord's Prayer, well,

> It is that state of things in action which the Lord's Prayer entreats to come into action. The threat implicit in that prayer—in that single clause—is very high; it is the only clause which carries a threat, but there it is clear. No word in English carries a greater possibility of terror than the little word 'as' in that clause; it is the measuring rod of the heavenly City, and the knot of the new union. But also it is the key of hell and the knife that cuts the knot of union.
>
> The condition of forgiving then is to be forgiven; the condition of being forgiven is to forgive. The two conditions are co-existent; they are indeed the very point of coexistence, the root of the new union, the beginning of the recovery of the co-inherence in which all creation had begun.[24]

Moving backwards, as it were, to the second practice of the life of substituted love, we encounter in rare places in literature the mention of "mystical substitution," whereby a person will actually pray with intentionality to God, actually offering up their very life *as an exchange for* the life of another. Deep in the annals of holy hermits of the Eastern Church are stories of elderly women praying to God to take their lives if only a beloved brother, say, or some other loved one finds salvation for his soul. I am running out of time, so will just mention this "mystical substitution" as a possibility mentioned by Sheldon Vanauken in his book, "A Severe Mercy," which I know many of you have read. It is a beautifully written love story that is true, in which Sheldon's ("Van's") beloved wife, "Davy," contracts a medically mysterious liver disease and dies very young. In the chapter "The Barrier Breached," he writes thus:

> And Davy one night, having contemplated holiness, said she was restless and would sleep in the guestroom. But she did not sleep: she prayed. All night, like the saints, she wrestled in prayer. Some say that prayer, even prayer for what God desires, releases power by the operation of a deep spiritual law; and to offer up what one loves may release still more. However that may be, Davy that night offered up her *life.* For me—that my soul might be fulfilled . . . Now, . . . she humbly proposed holy exchange. It was between her and the Incarnate One. I was not to know then.[25]

I will conclude this presentation by discussing in more detail what Williams meant by the practice of bearing burdens. In *He Came Down From Heaven*, he states the principle; in *Descent Into Hell*, perhaps his most successful novel, he illustrates a variety of ways in which burdens can be borne, the results of this activity, and the results of refusing to bear others' burdens. Pauline, the central character, fears meeting her doppelganger, an image of her very self, and she knows that when she finally meets it, she will go mad or die. Peter Stanhope, her poet/playwright friend, suggests that she is burdened more by the *fear* of meeting it than the actual encounter. He proposes to release Pauline from her fear by taking it upon himself. He asks her:

> ". . . Haven't you heard it said that we ought to bear one another's burdens?"
> "But that means—" she began, and stopped.
> "I know," Stanhope said. "It means listening sympathetically, and thinking unselfishly, and being anxious about, and so on. . . . But I think when Christ or St. Paul, or whoever said *bea* . . . he meant something much more like carrying a parcel instead of someone else. To bear a burden is precisely to carry it instead of. If you're still carrying yours, I'm not carrying it for you—however sympathetic I may be.[26]

Pauline gives her fear to Stanhope, and he tells her that when she is alone, she is to remember that he is being afraid instead of her. This is not merely a mental exercise of "mind over matter"; Pauline's fear continues to exist; she recognizes that it continues to be fear and her own fear, only Stanhope has taken it over. In a piece of wonderfully imaginative writing, Williams goes on in great detail to describe Stanhope, an Adept who is far along the way of sanctity in the Co-inherence of God, imagining Pauline in her fear:

> . . . Deliberately he opened himself to that fear, laying aside for awhile every thought of why he was doing it, forgetting every principle and law, absorbing only the strangeness and the terror of that separate spiritual identity . . . it was necessary first intensely to receive all her spirit's conflict. . . . The body of his flesh received her alien terror, his mind carried the burden of her world . . .[27]

The technique, Williams explains (in *He Came Down From Heaven*) needs practice and intelligence, as much intelligence as is needed for any other business contract. Any such agreement has three points: (i) to know the burden; (ii) to give up the burden; (iii) to take up the burden. Williams assures us that it is in the exchange of burdens that they become light. Further, he instructs that "the one who gives has to remember that he has parted with his burden, that it is being carried by another, and that his part is to believe that and be at peace . . . The one who takes has to set himself—mind and emotion and sensation—to the burden, to know it, imagine it, receive it—and sometimes not to be taken

aback by the swiftness of the divine grace and the lightness of the burden.[28]

Williams has two further words of warning concerning this practice of bearing burdens. First, he says that it is necessary to exercise a proper intelligence about what one contracts to undertake. It is necessary (a) not to take burdens too recklessly; and (b) to consider exactly how far any burden, accepted to the full, is likely to conflict with other duties. Secondly, he warns that it is difficult to carry out this burden in the physical world, saying that "the body is probably the last place where such interchange is possible; it is why Messias deigned to heal the body 'that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.' No such exchange is possible where any grudge—of pride, greed or jealousy—exists, nor any hate; so far all sins must have been 'forgiven' between men. . . .[29]

I close by mentioning that Williams really believed that such acts of substitution and burden bearing is independent of time and place. Shideler says that:

> . . . These are categories of nature, not restrictions upon the acts of exchange. So in circumstances where the substitution cannot take place at the time when the burden needs to be borne—as in Pauline's wish to carry her ancestor's fear—the act can be performed in eternity, the infinite contemporaneity of all things . . . What matters is not sequence or distance, but the living web of acts that makes up the Glory of God. . . . [30]

Shideler says that we know very little about bearing burdens and still less what could happen. Yet C.S. Lewis has written, with regards to the doctrine of bearing burdens, that "This Williams most seriously maintained, and I have reason to believe that he spoke from experimental knowledge."[31] If Lewis believed that Charles Williams was speaking with utter truth, should we not also believe and follow as Companions of the Co-inherence? As Williams told us, "the Glory is always to be observed in others."[32]

### Notes

[1] Cited in the "Introduction" of *The Masques of Amen House* (Altadena, CA: The Mythopoeic Press, 200.

[2] Alice Mary Hadfield, *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), p. 173.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

[4] Charles Williams, "The Society of Jesus," in *Charles Williams: "The Image of the City" and Other Essays* (London: Oxford UP, 1958), p. 115.

[5] Charles Williams, "The Founding of the Company," in *The Region of the Summer Stars* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 154-159.

[6] Mary M. Shideler, "Introduction," to *Taliessin Through Logres, The Region of the Summer Stars, and Arthurian Torso* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 10.

[7] Mary M. Shideler, *The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), p. 141.

[8] Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 5.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[10] Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit*., p. 141.

[11] Charles Williams, "The Forgiveness of Sins," in *He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), p. 109.

[12] As quoted in Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit*., p. 142.

[13] Charles Williams, "The Redeemed City," in *Charles Williams: "The Image of the City" and Other Essays, op. cit.*, p. 103.

[14] Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.

[15] Charles Williams, "The Region of the Summer Stars," *op. cit*., p. 26.

[16] Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 145.

[18] Charles Williams, *The Place of the Lion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), p. 187.

[19] Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

[20] Charles Williams, *Flecker of Dean Close*, p. 72, as quoted in Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

[21] Charles Williams, "Introduction," in *The Forgiveness of Sins, op. cit*., p. 108.

[22] Charles Williams, *The Forgiveness of Sins, op. cit*., p. 145.

[23] *Ibid*., p. 157.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 157.

[25] Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, pb., 1987), pp. 145-6.

[26] Charles Williams, *Descent Into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), p. 98.

[27] *Ibid*., pp. 100-101.

[28] Charles Williams, *He Came Down From Heaven, op. cit*., pp. 88-89.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[30] Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

[31] Cited by Mary M. Shideler, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[32] Charles Williams, "The Redeemed City," in *Charles Williams: "The Image of the City" and Other Essays, op. cit.*, p. 107.

# Dante and Tolkien: Their Ideas about Evil

John Seland

## Introduction

When we compare the lives of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) with that of J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973), we find that, although they lived in totally different historical periods and in countries culturally and geographically far removed from each other (one in Italy, the other in England), their lives as well as their writings bear several striking similarities. Both were fervent Catholics, both had personally experienced combat and war (about which they violently protested as being useless and wasteful), both expressed their views in literary works heavily tinged with philosophy and, with certain reservations in Tolkien's case, theology, and both wrote epics destined to influence not only their own culture, but that of the whole world.[1] Dante's masterpiece was *The Divine Comedy*, a story in which he expressed, in a mixture of realism with moral-allegorical elements, his political, social, and religious views. Tolkien, when referring to his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, preferred the word "applicability" rather than allegory: he was not specifically writing about real people and actual events in he world; rather he wanted the reader to make comparisons as he or she chose. At the same time, we see in Tolkien the same preoccupations as in Dante: a steady focus on man's spiritual condition in the world.[2]

In this essay, I would like to compare Dante's principal work with that of Tolkien, particularly their ideas of evil. There are many questions: how does Dante's medieval view of sin and evil differ from Tolkien's more modern view? Why did they think as they did? What influenced them? And how did their thinking about evil effect their ideas about good and about God, the supreme good?

## Dante: *The Divine Comedy*

As in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Divine Comedy* is presented in the form of a journey.[3] The pilgrim is Dante himself, who hopes to profit from his experiences and to return to earth and share what he has learned with others. One evening he finds himself in a Dark Forest, a symbol of his wayward life as a youth when he strayed from the true path.[4] Just when he is beginning his journey he is accosted by three beasts: a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf, animals that stand for Dante's vicious habits, which prevent his reform and keep him from growing closer to God.[5] The ravening wolf is Incontinence, (self-indulgence, or the unruly passions, such as lust and gluttony); the raging lion is Violence; the swift and stealthy leopard is Fraud (which would include deceit, lying, flattery, and so on (Grandgent p. 2, N. 4).[6] These animals also symbolize the three major sins in Hell: incontinence, violence, and fraud. Here at the beginning of his journey, we immediately see Dante's strong reliance on allegory, his journey representing that of each soul through life as it makes its way either to eternal life in Heaven or in Hell.[7]

At a loss as to which way he should go, he meets the virtuous Roman poet, Virgil (70-19 B.C.), who has been sent to guide him by three women: Mary, the mother of Jesus, Beatrice, the young woman with whom in real life Dante had fallen in love and whom he hopes to see in Heaven, and St. Lucy (the symbol of illuminating grace).[8]

Allegorically, Virgil represents Reason, the faculty that helps the intellect distinguish between good and evil, and that prepares for divine Revelation concerning God. Mankind, Dante suggests, can avoid evil and find

the path to goodness by following his Reason. Virgil also represents the Roman Empire.[9]

In order to escape the she-wolf, Virgil advises Dante to follow him along a longer path that will take him through Hell and Purgatory and, eventually, to the gates of Heaven. As they move along, Dante sees various personages in Hell: some historical, some mythological, some, like Adam, Cain and Moses, taken from the Bible, and still others, Dante's contemporaries. As might be expected, the greater their sins, the deeper they are plunged into Hell, each sinner being punished by the particular way they sinned during their lifetime.[10]

The learning experience is a painful one. Sometimes Virgil scolds Dante, telling him that his sympathy for certain souls who suffer as they do is a mark of disrespect for God's justice. At other times, Dante is so overcome with emotion that he faints, having recognized certain sins as those he himself has committed and for which he too may be punished.

Eventually, he and Virgil cross the Cocytus, the last of Hell's four rivers. And there they see, with his body frozen in the deepest pit of Hell, Satan himself, the very representative of sin, and guilty of betraying God. He has three heads, a reversal of the Triune God from whom he still foolishly tries to wrest power. What is significant here is that Virgil makes Dante looks at Satan directly in the face, which is to say, Dante must come to know evil as it truly is, just as he must see how utterly stupid Satan is, not only in trying to oppose God but also in his ignorance that evil is self-destructive. Dante also learns that evil comes the will, whether because the will decides not to do what God wants (as in the case of Lucifer), a lack of control of the will (as in Adam), or both.[11]

As he travels through the underworld, Dante learns, and in learning, grows, gradually coming to realize the enormity of sin and how it offends the goodness of God. In this way, he achieves a full disdain for sin and a realization of God's justice. At the same time, seeing the punishment of the lost souls in Hell helps him to steel his will lest he commit the same sins once he returns to real life again.

Once Dante has come to see the ugliness of sin, he is ready to emerge from the deepest part of Hell into a world lit by the stars. This light and his emergence into a new world gives him a sense of hope as he realizes that he need not give in to sin and that if he does avoid it, a better life and a better future can be had.

The physical structure of Purgatory differs from that of Hell. Hell is like a cone inverted downwards, its lowest point reaching the center of the earth; Purgatory's structure is a conically shaped mountain rising in the midst of the sea in a reverse direction—upwards towards heaven, the mountain suggesting the personal effort Dante must exert in order to save his soul and come closer to God. Like Hell, there are concentric circles and within each circle are those who, although their sins were not as great as those in Hell, are nevertheless now being punished for misbehaving on earth.[12] However, the souls here, unlike those in Hell, who curse God for what has befallen them, accept their punishments as their just due. They are also hopeful, knowing that after temporary suffering they will enter into eternal life in heaven, a life Adam once knew when he lived in Eden. By journeying through Purgatory, hopefully, Dante's soul will be even more fully cleansed and made ready for heaven.

An important section follows here, in Canto 8. When Dante emerged from Hell, he saw a constellation of stars in the South Pole, an indication that he was entering a new kind of world, Purgatory. Symbolically, they represent the four cardinal or moral virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance, virtues that regulate the moral life of every person, not just the Christian. Significantly, later in the day the four stars disappear and in their place he sees three others shining brilliantly in the sky. Also, when he sees the stars, an evil serpent appears and then quickly disappears. Allegorically, the three stars represent the theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. Dante's point is that the moral virtues are necessary to develop a good will. But they alone cannot overcome evil; to do so one must also rely on the theological virtues given by God. In terms of Dante's journey now through Purgatory, they are the graces he needs in order to purify his heart of all sin.

Eventually, Virgil and Dante pass through the seventh and last circle of Purgatory. When he arrives at the gates of Heaven, Virgil departs, human reasoning being unable to understand heavenly realities and thus lead him further.[13] In his place a woman dressed in white, Dante's beloved Beatrice, appears. She is the one who will tell him about the basic truths at the heart of existence (such as, the nature of the Fall, why Jesus became man, God as the goal of all Creation, and so on, and step by step lead him through Paradise and to his final end, God Himself.

**Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings***

With some of Dante's ideas of evil in mind, let us now examine Tolkien's work to see what he thought, beginning with a simple synopsis of the story.

In his book, *The Silmarillion* (1977), Tolkien outlines the history of Middle-earth. By means of the angelic-like, immortal Valar, Eru (the One) created Middle-earth, men, and elves. After doing this, the Valar lived in the Blessed Realm. However, according to one tradition, some of the Valar, led by Morgoth, wanted more power, and so they rebelled against Eru.

During these early years (in the First Age), one of the leading elves, Feanor, made three great jewels, the Silmarilli. Soon afterwards, Morgoth stole the jewels and took them to Middle-earth. Because of this, Feanor and the elves who had followed him to Middle-earth declared war on Morgoth. After a losing start, the elves

were eventually victorious; however, it was a precarious victory, for Morgoth still had some power.

Sometime later (around the year 500 of the Second Age), another rebellious Valar, Sauron, became active on Middle-earth and grew in power and strength. Then (around 1500) he and some of the elves skilled in crafts and metalwork forged some magic rings. Having learned from them how to do this, Sauron then made one powerful, albeit evil, Ring able to control all the others. In fact, so powerful was this Ring that Sauron realized he could use it to control and enslave all of Middle-earth.[14]

After this, fighting again broke out, this time between the men of Middle-earth, the Numenoreans, who had once fought with the Valar against Sauron, and Sauron himself. Sauron then fled to Mordor, in the southeastern part of Middle-earth, which he made into a stronghold.

Even later (in 3430 of the Second Age), a great battle was waged against Sauron by an alliance of elves and men. It was during this battle that Sauron's body was slain and when Isildur, a noble Numenorean, cut the Ring from Sauron's dead hand and foolishly kept it for his own use.

In *The Hobbit*, we learn what then happened to the Ring. When Isildur was killed trying to escape from some orcs (creatures made by Sauron to counteract the elves) by swimming across the Anduin River, a hobbit by the name of Deagol, eventually found the Ring. However, his cousin, Smeagol (Gollum), killed him and took possession of it. Many years later Bilbo happened to find this Ring when he entered a tunnel used by Gollum. After some exciting adventures in which he acted heroically, Bilbo returned to the Shire, still in possession of the Ring.

*The Lord of the Rings* begins around the time Bilbo gives the Ring to Frodo, though very reluctantly, since its mere possession has begun to work its corruptive power in his heart. Gandalf, a wizard, then tells Frodo that having the Ring is no mere accident—he was *meant* to have it. This, of course, is one indication that a higher, benevolent Power is at work trying to save not only the Shire but all of Middle-earth as well. At the same time, Frodo is free to accept or reject the responsibility of bearing the Ring, that is, he has a free will and can make a choice. Gandalf also tells him about the origin and the power of the Ring and that Sauron knows it is now in the Shire. In order to protect his fellow hobbits, Frodo leaves soon afterwards for Rivendell where, thanks to the help of a mysterious man named Strider (Aragorn) and some elves, he eventually arrives safely, having had some harrowing experiences, once with evil barrow-wights, and once with the nine Black Riders, servants of Sauron, during which he was wounded.

At a Council at Rivendell, Gandalf reveals that the chief wizard of his order, Saruman, has also been corrupted by a desire for the Ring, and that he has suggested to Gandalf that he join him in getting it. Once it is theirs, they can defeat Sauron and eventually establish a good kingdom on Middle-earth. However, Gandalf refuses, saying that evil means cannot be used to bring about a good end. The Council also decides that the best course is to destroy the Ring at Mount Doom. Frodo then agrees to take the Ring there and do this.

As Frodo and his friends travel along, they experience at times the power of evil, but also that of good. An instance where good works in their favor can be seen when, at one point, Frodo decides to go alone in order to reflect on the next step they should take—whether to help defend Gondor, or to continue straightway to Mount Doom. Seeing Frodo leave the camp, Boromir, one of the Company, follows him and tries to force the Ring from him, believing that it should be used to defeat Sauron's forces at Gondor. Frodo manages to escape Boromir by putting on the Ring, but soon afterwards the camp where Merry and Pippin are staying as they wait for Frodo to return is attacked by orcs. Boromir, having by this time returned, sees the orcs, tries valiantly to defend the two hobbits, but is eventually killed.

Later, Aragorn reflects on this. He sees the orc attack as something providential, for it gave Boromir the chance to compensate for his greed by sacrificing his life for the hobbits.

Another example of how good can sometimes come from evil can be seen when the orcs capture Merry and Pippin after Boromir has been killed. Managing to escape, they make their way to a large forest where the Ents, the "giant shepherds of the trees," live. When the Ents learn how Saruman is cutting down trees at the edge of their forest (Fangorn), they march to his stronghold at Isengard and overthrow him. Again, it can be seen how certain unforeseen happenings seem to be "arranged" by a higher, benevolent power so that good can come from a potentially bad situation. Still another example is seen when Frodo is tempted to keep the Ring rather than throw it into Mount Doom. Just then Gollum bites off Frodo's finger to get the Ring; however, having become unbalanced, he falls into the volcano, thus destroying Sauron's power forever. Still another example of how Providence guides the hobbits can be seen at the end of the novel, when Gandalf tells the hobbits that he will not return with them to the Shire to rid it of the evil elements that have entered it, since they are capable to doing this themselves, their entire journey being a kind of preparation for this.

**Dante: The Influence of the Bible, Sin, the Church, Medieval Torture, the Scholastics**

A study of *The Divine Comedy* shows that Dante's presentation of evil is at times the same as Tolkien's and at times different. Here we would like to examine the reasons for this by taking a look at the way they

were influenced by two basic sources, the Bible and some of the social practices at the time.

Both Dante and Tolkien rely heavily on the Bible, but their respective use, emphasis, and understanding of particular aspects of the Bible is sometimes different. First of all, Dante tends to interpret passages of the Bible more literally than Tolkien, just as he is closer in spirit to the Old than the New Testament. Passages that condemn sin are taken at face value, such as Psalm 5:5: "You hate all who do evil; you destroy all who lie. The deceitful and bloodthirsty man the Lord detests." Or, again, in Psalm 11: "The Lord tests the just and the wicked; the lover of violence he hates. He sends a scorching fire and brimstone on the wicked; he send a scorching wind as their lot." In Dante's Hell we see these words enacted literally: those placed there suffer from fire and from the wind that drives the fires of Hell.

Both of them also take with utmost seriousness the ideas expressed in Ephesians (6:12), 1 Peter 5:8, and the Book of Revelation (12:1-17) that evil is a cosmic power roaming the world to devour and destroy whatever is good. However, Tolkien stresses the power of this force much more than Dante, this being in line with his conviction that all forms of power are evil. (Cf. Mingardi.) While not excluding other forms of evil, he prefers to limit his examination to this so that he can study it more closely.

Related to this is the fact that Tolkien limits his portrayal of evil to relatively few creatures, such as the Black Riders, the orcs, the Balrog, the barrow-wights, Gollum, and Grima, Saruman's agent and spy. In proportion to these, much more importance is given to the leading evil powers: Morgoth, Sauron and Saruman. Dante, differs, giving only scant attention to Satan (Canto XXXIV). His main focus is on sin, whether types of sin or individual sins, which, of course, makes his work more diversified, since sin exists in many different forms. One surmises that the nature of *The Divine Comedy* leads him to do this. He had strong personal dislikes and one way to express this was to show how his enemies are suffering from their particular sin either in Hell or Purgatory.[15] Several points can be made about this.

First, here one can see the influence of the Medieval Church, which—most likely to compel the faithful to avoid sin by making them fear its effects, but also to maintain control over them—put a great deal of emphasis on sin and types of sins, like the Seven Deadly Sins, or whether sins were mortal (serious and leading to spiritual death) or venial (less serious); and the punishment due to sin because it offended God's holiness. Here too we see how the Scholastics—Dante particularly liked Thomas Aquinas—with their minute distinctions and love of syllogistic reasoning—had a strong influence. Dante's love of categorizing and his way of distinguishing between greater and lesser virtues and sins, as he does in *The Divine Comedy*, surely relates to this.

Second, besides adding his own imaginative punishments for the damned, Dante borrowed from various cruel forms of medieval torture and imprisonment. (J.C., "Dante's Inferno: Creative and Cruel," 1-3.) Some of his descriptions of Hell echo closely the prison conditions of his time, where it could be possible for someone to be chained to a wall and to endure the filth and his smell of his own bodily waste (*Inferno*, Canto XVIII).

Third, one must also take in account what "sin" meant at the time and how severe punishments were melted out for particular offences. This helps to explain why Dante put those who commit suicide into Hell: the opinion at the time being that despair was among the worst of sins since it was a refusal of God's mercy and forgiveness. (This was also Augustine's opinion.) Heretics, who were burned, sometimes in public, are also there, and among them are Mohammed (570-632 A.D.) and his son Ali. Dante felt they were a source of division in the world and could easily lead Muslim believers to attack and destroy the Church. Fortunetellers are also severely punished, for it was felt at the time that this was a form of blasphemy because only God knew the future. Besides all this, it was lawful for relatives of an offended party to take vengeance on the offender. Considering all this, one realizes that people at the time held different ethical standards than society today.

In addition to this, we also know that in medieval times life was precarious. Sickness and plagues could readily wipe out an entire village. Wars (one lasting a hundred years) were not uncommon. And the life span was much shorter than today, death often claiming mothers and children at birth. Who better to blame for all this than the devil, who was thought to be "just around the corner?"

All this helps us to understand why Dante writes so realistically about such cruel tortures and punishments and why his Hell, the devil's abode, is such a horrible place.

**Tolkien: The Influence of the Bible and Psychology**

When we examine Tolkien's use of the Bible, an obvious fact is that, besides developments in the Church and in Catholic thought (whereby human nature and frailty came to be better understood), he was able to profit from many years of Scripture study by innumerable scholars who were able to interpret and assess various biblical passages more accurately and, in doing so, to come to a better knowledge of good and evil. They were at the same time able to see God not so much as One who judges and condemns, but as a being who loves what He has created and who shows mercy to those who, for various reasons, fail.

One clear instance of this occurs in *The Lord of the Rings*. At one point (just before he treacherously leads Frodo and Sam through the tunnel where the giant

spider Shelob lives), Gollum is treated kindly by Frodo. This causes Gollum to have a dialog with his other, "good," self, Smeagol, the name he had before murdering his cousin, Deagol, and taking the Ring for himself. Frodo's kindness tempts Gollum to desist in his plan to have Shelob eat them (which would allow Gollum to regain the Ring). Unfortunately, however, when Sam berates Gollum soon after this, accusing him of spying on him and Frodo, the moment passes, and the evil part of his nature once again takes over. Tolkien's point here, of course, is that Frodo's act of mercy is more praiseworthy than Sam's more judgmental scolding.

Another instance where Tolkien relies more on the New Testament is in his depiction of the Christ-like Frodo. Like Jesus, he accepts responsibility for others. And, like Jesus who, in giving up his life, saved the world, Frodo, in destroying the power of the Ring, saves Middle-earth. Frodo's leaving for the Blessed Realm is also quite similar to Jesus's ascension to heaven. Galadriel also has characteristics that recall Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

One must also consider the fact that Tolkien was very much influenced by modern developments in anthropology and psychology, developments that led to a more sympathetic understanding of the human psyche. Thus, ways of thought and behavior that were formerly considered to be a matter of choice, now came to be seen, at least partially, as hereditary, which, of course, lessened personal culpability. To use the example of suicide, modern science has come to see that one who takes his or her life could very well have inherited certain genes that caused that person to become depressive. In any case, one feels that centuries of study of human nature allowed Tolkien to evaluate man in a more positive light than Dante did.

**Dante: The Influence of Philosophy and Theology**

Here a word about the influence of St. Augustine, whose influence was deeply felt not only in the Middle Age, may be in order.

As is well known, a certain fifth-century thinker by the name of Pelagius believed that when Adam sinned he merely set a bad example; Original Sin did not "originate" in him. Furthermore, Adam's sin was confined only to him, for "Adam neither injured nor deprived us of anything." And so because mankind is fundamentally good and does not have an inherent propensity to sin, it does not need grace. If man acts rightly, human nature and free will are enough to keep on the right path and lead him to heaven (*Collier's Encyclopedia*, vol. 18, 536). Augustine attacked this idea. In his famous book, *Confessions* (c. 398-99 A.D.), he expresses the idea that, although man has a free will, human nature became corrupted when Adam fell; he fell away from God and thus suffered a loss of wholeness. As a consequence, he suffers the evil of a less ample existence. Thus "good is not extinguished by vice but simply diminished" (*Collier's Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 222, 223, 224). Humanity, then, actually shares in Adam's sin; it "inherits" the guilt and other consequences (a weakened will, sickness and death) that Adam incurred when he sinned. And because man is inherently sinful and cannot do anything that is non-sinful, grace is needed.

If some favored Pelagius's optimistic view of human nature, there were also many who felt that Augustine's stricter opinion was more accurate. This became the official position of the Church, for it saw that Augustine's theory coincided with St. Paul's opinion about the weakness of the will. (Romans 7:14-25).

Bearing in mind that the *Inferno* was only one part of Dante's *Commedia* and that the other two parts show people who merit or will merit Heaven because of their virtue, Dante strongly leans towards Augustine's ideas, this being at least one explanation for the emphasis he put on sin and human weakness.

Dante was also strongly influenced by Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), the Scholastic thinker who synthesized the ideas of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) with the dogmas of the Church. According to Aquinas, evil in itself cannot properly be said to exist. Not being completely real in itself, it is dependent on good for its existence. Thus heretics need orthodoxy as an objective norm against which they find reasons for their existence, just as hypocrites need truth for their existence. Thomas's idea is especially applicable to Lucifer, who rebelled against God. Had Lucifer nothing to rebel against, of course, he would have had no reason to fight God and the good angels.

**Tolkien: The Influence of Philosophy and Theology, and His Originality**

Like Dante, Tolkien follows the ideas of St. Augustine and Aquinas quite closely. He too believed that nothing starts out evil but by the free choice of created beings turn into evil. Morgoth, Sauron, Saruman, Gollum—all were created good by Eru. But, having fallen under the enticement of the Ring, they eventually became its slaves.

Another Augustinian idea, that evil needs good to exist, is illustrated in the story of the Ring. Lying on the ground in Gollum's tunnel, it can do nothing of itself, but once someone begins to wear it, it begins to control the bearer's will. It is for this reason that Gandalf and Galadriel refuse to wear it, knowing that its mere possession corrupts the one who has it. In *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien follows this idea. Of itself, the Ring is simply a thing, although full of latent power. But it longs for someone to wear it so that it can ensnare that person and begin to work its evil power. It makes the wearer less an individual, which is to say, the individual begins to lose his identify and turn more and more, as is

the case with the Black Riders, into a shade or shadow. "In relation to the individual, then, possessing the Ring means that the individual loses sense of who he is and what he truly wants" (Chance 30).

A further example of Tolkien's use of an idea shared by Augustine and Aquinas is the idea that evil often turns into good. We see this several times in the story of the Ring, perhaps the clearest example being when Gollum forcibly takes the Ring from Frodo and falls into Mount Doom, thus destroying the Ring and, with it, Sauron's power forever.

Still another idea propounded by Augustine was that evil has its origin outside the heart; however, if allowed to enter, it corrupts. Tolkien changes this somewhat, since we see that merely having the Ring is enough to begin the process of corruption, but, basically, he follows Augustine's idea that evil comes from outside.

Besides, of course, the creation of Middle-earth, with all its diverse characters and happenings, what is most original in Tolkien's concept of evil is his idea that a created being, Sauron, can make a spiritual reality, a Ring so powerful that it can corrupt everything that an almighty, benevolent power, Eru, has created. That Eru would allow him to ruin everything He has made is another matter; most likely he would not. But this is to read into the story the lessons of the Book of Revelation, which has a happy ending, God controlling and eventually destroying evil.

As has been pointed out, there is no dearth of positive elements in his story: Providence seems to help the Company as they carry out their mission, sending various personages to help them and giving support in various other ways (through the *lembas*, through powerful magic words, a magic rope, and so on); at times evil is turned to good, and so on. But Tolkien refuses to leave us feeling comfortable.

Tolkien's epic, where Gandalf, Elrond, Galadriel, Bilbo, Frodo—physically and spiritually wounded—leave for the Blessed Realm, leaves ambiguous the answer to the question, which has proved victorious, good or evil? We are also aware of the fact that in the history of the Ring, Sauron was once defeated (for example, in 1693 of the First Age), only to rise later (in 3429 of the same Age) to harass the inhabitants of Middle-earth again. The Ring destroyed his power, but what would prevent him from rising again in another form at another time?

When we speak about Sauron and the Ring, the key word is "spiritual." In our world humans can, of course, create material things, although even here they are limited, since they must rely on other material things to do so. (One can only make bread when certain ingredients are available.) Sauron's Ring is similar in the sense that he relies on the craftsmanship of the elves, and one can imagine that he used fire and other metals to make the Ring. Nevertheless, by doing so he has made something that is spiritual and that has almost unlimited power to do evil.

Of course, a large part of this is scriptural, Lucifer being the first of many who, in their pride, desired to be like God and to have equal power. Tolkien's idea that the mere desire to have the Ring, that is, the mere desire to have power, is also biblical, since sin occurs not in the act itself, but in the initial desire. But he goes further by investing in this Ring a spiritual power. In itself it symbolizes the desire for power, while at the same time being in itself an evil thing that corrupts. This is where Tolkien is original.

**Conclusion**

In the final analysis, both writers see evil as something real and absolute; it truly exists. However, their way of showing this differs. Especially in the *Inferno,* Dante dwells more extensively on the causes and effects of evil, including the way sinful behavior wreaks havoc on the natural environment. His method is to portray the dark side of human nature in gruesome detail, enforcing it with horrible images (such as the two sinners who spend their time gnawing on each other's head (Canto XXXII), or the episode in Canto XXV (most likely borrowed from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*) where a thief who has been transformed into a serpent attacks another thief and abuses him sexually, with the result that both are mutated into a creature neither serpent nor human being). Through such images we are constantly reminded of "man's inveterate deviation from the path of God" (Grandgent, *The Portable Dante* xxiii).

Tolkien's portrait of certain parts of Middle-earth, such as the wasteland around Mordor, is as vivid and horrifying as the *Inferno*. However, although he periodically shows how evil grips certain characters in the story, such as the hobbits, representatives of humans—we see some of this, for example, when Frodo resists handing over the Ring to Gandalf, or when Boromir tries to wrest it from Frodo—he does not dwell on it as much. His focus is more on evil itself, its power and the way it manifests itself in beings more "super-natural," such as Morgoth, Sauron, and Saruman. Thus, in contradistinction to Dante, we see how at times the characters act with mercy towards those who have done evil. (Frodo shows pity for Gollum and Grima, as Gandalf does for Saruman).

In the final analysis, neither Dante nor Tolkien had any illusions about the utter perversity of evil. Good and evil, they realized, were like two different magnets: Satan, not wanting individuals to exist as individuals, trying to make them as he is, totally evil; God, the source of good and love, drawing those who do good closer to union with one another and with Himself.[16]

## Notes

[1] As Tom Shippey points out, *The Lord of the Rings* "contains almost no direct religious references at all" (xxxii). But, of course, we are free to imagine connections between the text and religion. One can imagine, for example, that Frodo's journey to Mount Doom is similar to Christ's journey to Golgatha.

[2] The critic, R. Montano, writes explicitly that Dante's work was not strictly allegorical. Rather, "[h]e was concerned with the concrete problems of the world, with persons, with Florence and Italy, with ways to restore the Empire . . . Dante's vision is essentially a profound and consistent vision of history rivaling St. Augustine's and Vico's; and a vision is not speculative theology. For Dante, God operates through history and in contemplation of the historical process His will can be seen and understood . . . This emphasis on secular history and politics as an essential foundation of God's kingdom is the most important characteristic of Dante's vision" (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Vol. 14, 521).

[3] Unlike Dante, who makes a journey in order to get something, or find something—Beatrice and, ultimately, God—Frodo must give up something, the Ring.

[4] Dante dates his experiences in the Dark Forest as occurring on the night of April 7, 1300, and the dawn of April 8, 1300, Good Friday. But the actual writing of the epic took place later: Hell, in 1312; Purgatory, in 1315; and Paradise between 1316 and 1321.

[5] Harold Bloom writes about Dante's character faults. "Dante was brazen, aggressive, prideful, and audacious beyond all poets, before or after" (78). Dante himself alludes to his faults several times in the poem, indicating his clear awareness of the weaknesses of his own character.

[6] These animals also symbolize the three major sins in Hell: incontinence, violence, and fraud. Dante's point is that if bad habits are allowed to continue, they can readily turn into sins.

[7] "Allegorically the *Commedia* is "the history of Dante's own soul, the journey of his mind to God, serving as a prime example for every reader and helping him to rediscover the 'straight way' of a moral life that leads to perfection" (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Macropaedia*, Vol. 16, 1024.)

[8] Virgil is one of several other guides as Dante makes his way from Hell to Paradise. Another is Nessus, who guides them across the Phlegethon River in Hell. Still another is Sordello, a Christian who meets them in Purgatory. Having met Sordello, Virgil soon gives way to him, the meaning being that a pagan cannot guide the soul as well as a Christian can. Virgil is a good guide when journeying through Hell, however, he is disadvantaged in Purgatory since this higher realm involves the redemption of the soul, about which Virgil can offer no advice since he lacks faith.

Beatrice Portinari was born in 1266, only several months after Dante, and died in 1290. Dante loved her from the time he was nine years old. Later, in 1287, she married a banker, Simone dei Bardi. Dante himself married another woman, Gemma dei Donati, in 1298; he had three sons and a daughter by her. In the poem Beatrice takes on various roles: at one time she represents Theology, at another, Revelation, Wisdom personified, or even a type of Christ. At the same time, whenever Dante writes about her, he manages to keep before our eyes her reality as a real person.

[9] Dante firmly believed that the Church, with her duty to take care of the spiritual life of man, must work hand in hand with the State, which is responsible for establishing good laws in order to bring about a just and moral society. While their sphere of operation differs, they are, or should be, interdependent. He also felt that the social disorders of Italy, where various factions were fighting for supremacy—Guelphs (the new business and commercial class) against Ghibellines (the feudal nobility), and Whites (a later group aligned with the Guelphs) against Blacks (aligned with the Ghibellines)—were caused, basically, because the Church was involving itself too much in the social problems of society, just as the State was interfering in matters that should have been left to the Church. But, in what appears to be a contradiction, Dante at times begged certain rulers, like Henry VII (Emperor 1309-1313), to come to Italy and to correct some of the erroneous steps being taken by the Roman Curia. His hope was to have the Emperor purify the Church and then step back to let the Church function according to her divine mission.

[10] "The punishments in the *Inferno* follow the law of *contrapasso* ("counter penalty")—that is, the punishment is commensurate with the fault." (Mandelbaum, *Inferno*, Canto III, p. 349, Note 52-69.) Diviners, astrologers, and magicians, for example, because they tried to predict the future, are punished by having their heads turned backwards; usurers, who demanded high interest from loans, are condemned to stare eternally at money; the lustful are tormented by continual stormy weather, just as in life they failed to keep their passions under control, and so on.

[11] This is but one instance of Dante's heavy reliance on Scripture. Here, of course, he uses Paul's idea as seen in Romans 7:14-25, where he writes about the

weakness of the will and the necessity of grace for salvation.

[12] Dante also writes about the Church's belief in the efficacy of prayers for the deceased. When living people, for instance, pray for the soul of a deceased person in Purgatory, such prayers are able to mitigate the suffering. Unfortunately, many abuses arose from this idea, like the practice of offering money to the clergy so that the sufferings of "the poor souls in Purgatory" might be lessened.

[13] "Because, as a pagan. Virgil did not worship God, he is not allowed entry to His city" (Mandelaum, *Inferno*, Canto 1, p. 347, Note 125-26).

[14] "The Ring works its power—illustrating the nature of the novel as a work about power—because more than anything it wishes to return to its maker-master and therefore wants to be put on (to make the wearer naturally invisible but supernaturally visible to the Eye of Sauron). In relation to the individual, then, possessing the Ring means that the individual loses sense of who he is and what he truly wants" (Chance 30). To put this in other words one might say that the Ring seeks to rid the owner or wearing of the Ring to loose his power or, as Jane Chance say, to fill him with an "illusion of power" so that it can assert its own over him (31).

[15] Dante's chief enemy was Boniface VIII, a devious Pope who ruled the Church between 1294-1303). It was he who, through the Black Guelfs, banished Dante, then allied to the Whites, from his birthplace, Florence, in 1302. Dante, forbidden even to visit the city under pain of death, never returned. (Cf. *Inferno*, Cantos XIX and XXVII)

[16] The Scholastics accepted Aristotle's teaching that "the principle of Love unifies all things, alternating with Hate, which keeps things discrete and separate" (Mandelbaum, *Inferno*, Canto V, 363, Note 41-3).

In the same way "the perfection of the spirit and the body lies in their unity. Consequently, only after the Judgment Day, when all souls are reunited with their bodies, will [with the exception of those in Hell] the dead regain this perfection" (Mandelbaum, *Inferno*, Canto XII, p. 356, Note 106-8).

Aquinas utilizes this idea of unity when he describes the anatomy of Eros.

> Love is more unitive than knowledge in seeking the thing, not the thing's reason; its bent is to a real union, though this can be constituted only by knowledge. Other effects of love are enumerated: a reciprocal abiding, mutual *inhaesio*, of lover and beloved together; a transport, *extasis*, out of the self to the other; an ardent cherishing, *zelus*, of another; a melting, *liquefactio*, so that the heart is unfrozen and open to be entered; a longing in absence . . . In delight, too, there is an all at once wholeness and timelessness that reflects the *tota simul* of eternity; an edge of sadness similar to that of the Gift of Knowledge; an expansion of spirit; a complete fulfillment of activity without satiety, for they that drink shall yet thirst. (Mandelbaum, *Inferno*, xvi)

The idea of love as the perfection of unity was, in fact, postulated years before, when Augustine, in his *Confessions*, wrote the now-famous words: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

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## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# C.S. Lewis and Frederick Buechner: Literary Expression of Faith

Victoria S. Allen

C.S. Lewis and Frederick Buechner never met, yet they are "friends" because they share so many similarities as authors writing from a Christian perspective. In terms of Buechner's themes and range of his writings, this award wining American author and ordained Presbyterian minister may have as much in common with C.S. Lewis as his own British Inklings. So let me introduce Frederick Buechner and his writings.

Frederick Buechner (b. 1926) has published over 30 fiction and non-fiction works and is regarded, like C.S. Lewis, as a Christian apologist as well as a literary figure. Like Lewis, Buechner's non-fiction involves the interaction of faith and literature as well as memoirs of his journey to faith and beyond. Also like Lewis, he has a large following of persons who enjoy his writings, which are both literarily and spiritually challenging. Perhaps most in common with Lewis is Buechner's imagination, humor and phenomenal ability to put into words the truth of spiritual experience in insightful and memorable ways. Like Lewis he is therefore often quoted from the pulpit and by other writers.

Frederick Buechner's published works span a period of 56 years and include 16 novels, personal memoirs, collections of sermons, humorous lexicons, daily meditations, literary criticism, Christian apologetics and, as one reviewer put it, "a half-century's worth of thinking aloud about the Christian way" (JAD). Although he has long been recognized as an articulate Christian voice in mainline churches and seminaries, he is relatively unknown in some evangelical circles, yet his papers are archived in the Wheaton College special collections, close to those of his "friends" C.S. Lewis, George MacDonald, Dorothy Sayers, J.R.R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield and Charles Williams in Wheaton's Ward Collection of British authors. As the book buyer for the Logos Bookstore in Nassau, Bahamas, I first read Frederick Buechner in 1982, when I ordered his newly published memoir *The Sacred Journey* at the suggestion of the Logos Association. As I explain in the introduction to my book *Listening to Life: Psychology and Spirituality in the Writings of Frederick Buechner* (2002):

> Intrigued by the title, I began to read the slim volume and was immediate captured by the poetic insight Buechner brought to this memoir of his early life. He described his life "before time" as an age of innocence, when like Adam, he learned to name the animals and experienced a child's sensory immediacy and wonder, not unlike that described by James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* I was struck by Buechner's rude awakening "once upon a time" when as a ten-year-old he looked down from the upstairs window to view the motionless body of his father who had just committed suicide. And I was moved by his spiritual awakening to a dimension "beyond time" which changed the course of his life forever.
>
> As I read and reread *The Sacred Journey*, Buechner's style reminded me of C.S. Lewis, whose *Chronicles of Narnia* I was reading to my children at the time. Like Lewis, Buechner's seemingly simple narrative revealed an unfolding spirituality of biblical proportions. At the same time, his deep psychological insight into his own motivation and experience echoed that of author/psychiatrist Dr. Paul Tournier.

> *The Sacred Journey* provided my introduction to Frederick Buechner, but it was not until 1997, when as a doctoral candidate at the Catholic University of America I was searching for a topic for my dissertation, that I came to know his work on a deeper level. As a graduate student in English at Georgetown University, I had written my master's thesis on Flannery O'Connor. Now I was searching for an American author less analyzed by scholars, who also infused skilled literary expression with spiritual insight and a Christian world view. When two fellow graduate students [who, by the way, had done their undergraduate work at Calvin College], recommended Frederick Buechner, I learned that in addition to his memoirs he had written sixteen novels and numerous works of non-fiction. As I read the Buechner corpus, I began to see that Buechner's psychological/spiritual perspective in *The Sacred Journey* characterized his fiction. Not strange, for Buechner's creativity, psychological insights, and faith flow from a 'deep inner place' (Brown 44), the *imago dei* where he sees with the eyes of the heart. (xiii-xiv)

"At its heart most theology, like most fiction, is essentially autobiography" (3) begins *The Alphabet of Grace* Buechner's first autobiographical journal which marked a significant development in his understanding of faith. Buechner had received an invitation to give The William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard in 1969. Before agreeing he asked for clarification on the topic of the lectures. In a later memoir, Buechner relates the answer he received:

> Perhaps something in the area of "religion and letters," he wrote back, and it was the word *letters* that did it.
>
> What he meant by the word was clear enough, but suddenly I found myself thinking of letters literally instead—of letters as the alphabet itself, the A's, B's, C's and D's out of which all literature, all words, are ultimately composed. And from there I wandered somehow to the notion of the events of our lives—even, and perhaps especially, the most everyday events—as the alphabet through which God, of his grace, spells out his words, his meaning to us. So *The Alphabet of Grace* was the title I hit upon, and what I set out to do was to try to describe a single representative day of my life in a way to suggest what there was of God to hear in it. . . . In writing those lectures and the book they later turned into, it came to seem to me that if I were called upon to state in a few words the essence of everything I was trying to say both as a novelist and as a preacher, it would be something like this: Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace. What I started trying to do as a writer and as a preacher was more and more to draw on my own experience not just as a source of plot, character, illustration, but as a source of truth. (NT 86-87)

In his memoir *The Sacred Journey,* Buechner explains how to "listen to your life":

> What each of them [events of our lives] might be thought to mean separately is less important than what they all mean together. At the very least they mean this: mean *listen*. Listen. Your life is happening. . . . A journey, years long, has brought each of you through thick and thin to this moment in time as mine has also brought me. Think back on that journey. Listen back to the sounds and sweet airs of your journey that give delight and hurt not and to those too that give no delight at all and hurt like Hell. *Be not affeard*. The music of your life is subtle and elusive and like no other—not a song with words but a song without words, a singing, clattering music to gladden the heart or turn the heart to stone, to haunt you perhaps with echoes of a vaster, farther music of which it is part.
>
> The question is not whether the things that happen to you are chance things or God's things because, of course, they are both at once. There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak—even the walk from the house to the garage that you have walked ten thousand times before, even the moments when you cannot believe there is a God who speaks at all anywhere. He speaks, I believe, and the words he speaks are incarnate in the flesh and blood of our selves and of our own footsore and sacred journeys. We cannot live our lives constantly looking back, listening back, lest we be turned to pillars of longing and regret, but to live without listening at all is to live deaf to the fullness of the music. Sometimes we avoid listening for fear of what we may hear; sometimes for fear that we may hear nothing at all but the empty rattle of our

> own feet on the pavement. But be not affeard says Caliban, nor is he the only one to say it. "Be not afraid," says another, "for lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He says he is with us on our journeys. He says he has been with us since each of our journeys began. Listen for him. Listen to the sweet and bitter airs of your present and your past for the sound of him. (SJ 77-78)

Interwoven into the Buechnerian style is the natural integration of Scripture and quotes from Shakespeare. Words of Caliban from *The Tempest* exemplify Buechner's technique of showing literature as a way to get at essentials. This appreciation of literature as a vehicle for listening to life parallels his view of psychotherapy and spirituality—all increase our perception of God's grace being played out in our experience.

In his writing, Buechner draws deeply from his own life experience which in many ways parallels the early life of C.S. Lewis. Like Lewis's autobiography *Surprised by Joy* , in his memoir *The Sacred Journey* Buechner reflects on the mysterious ways God was speaking to him culminating in his conversion at age 27. To understand why Buechner and Lewis share so much in common, it is helpful to review some highlights from Buechner's memoirs of his childhood and experiences leading up to his conversion.

Like Lewis, reading imaginary fiction was a major preoccupation of Buechner's childhood. He recalls that as a boy during a year of sickness, "I lived a year in Oz (1932) and have been homesick for it ever since" (*The Clown in the Belfry* 28). As he became Immersed in the Oz books by L. Frank Baum, the world of Oz became more real than the world outside his bedroom. . In *Sacred Journey* Buechner describes his fascination with the Land of Oz where animals talk and no one dies which in some mysterious way became a key road mark on his sacred journey. Buechner was particularly drawn to a character named King Rinkitink, who eventually evolved into the hero of many of Buechner's novels. This king was plumb and ebullient, foolish and vulnerable, but even in his weakness he demonstrated tremendous wisdom and strength. Buechner describes him as later turning up in unexpected places, such as in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, where according to Buechner "he appears as the character of Sunday . . . . that billowing, zany powerhouse of a man, [who] reveals his true identity finally by saying, "I am the Sabbath. I am the Peace of God" (SJ 18).

As a child Lewis too was a devout reader of myths and legends and even created his own fictional kingdom, Animal-Land, filled with talking animals, although Lewis states it was devoid of the wonder which characterized Narnia. He recalls "at the age of six, seven, and eight—I was living almost entirely in my imagination; or at least that the imaginative experience of those years now seems to me more important than anything else" (*Surprised by Joy* 15). At this time Lewis also experienced what he called moments of Joy—intense awareness of beauty in nature or in reading Beatrix Potter's *Squirrel Nutkin* or in poetry—that left him with a sense of longing for this Joy which he had glimpsed in a moment. Lewis comments that his reading Norse legends may have prepared him "to acquire some capacity for worship against the day when the true God should recall me to Himself" (*Surprised by Joy* 77).

Reflecting on his experience forty years later, Buechner explains why his boyhood reading was so significant:

> Nothing was more remote from my thought as this period than theological speculation . . . but certain patterns were set, certain rooms were made ready, so that when, years later, I came upon Saint Paul for the first time and heard him say, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are," I had the feeling that I knew something of what he was talking about. Something of the divine comedy that we are all of us involved in. Something of grace (SJ 18).

Another major similarity in the childhood of the two writers was the loss of a parent. When he was 10, Lewis's mother died of cancer. In 1936 when Buechner was 10, his father committed suicide. For both boys, this loss proved to be a turning point—when childhood innocence ended, and the reality of time began. Lewis recalls "With my mother's death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life" (*Surprised by Joy* 21). But whereas Lewis deeply grieved the loss of his parent, at the time Buechner did not. In Buechner's home, his father's suicide became a family secret, something one did not talk about. There was no funeral for his father, and the memorial held for his father the following fall his family did not attend. Buechner describes this experience of losing his father as something he did not consciously feel at the time, but which he came to realize shook the very ground of his existence. For twenty years Buechner unconsciously wove his father's suicide into his novels. After being in therapy, he wrote his three memoirs partly to discover how God was nevertheless with him through his father's loss, but also to illustrate how important it is to talk about a painful experience. As a way to listen to life, in therapy Buechner discovered the importance of remembering. In a short novel *The Wizard's Tide (*republished under the title *The Christmas Tide)*, Buechner refashions his family's reaction to his father's death, rewriting it as it should have been—a time for

the family to openly share their grief to bring acceptance and healing . In many of his writings Buechner stresses the importance of memory:

> We cannot undo our old mistakes or their consequences any more than we can erase old wounds that we have both suffered and inflicted, but through the power that memory gives us of thinking, feeling, imagining our way back through time we can at long last finally finish with the past in the sense of removing the power to hurt us and other people and to stunt our growth as human beings . . . . It is through memory that we are able to reclaim much of our lives that we have long since written off by finding that in everything that has happened to us over the years God was offering us possibilities of new life and healing which, though we may have missed them at the time, we can still choose and be brought to life by and healed by all these years later.
>
> Another way of saying it, perhaps, is that memory makes it possible for us both to bless the past, even those parts of it that we have always felt cursed by, and also to be blessed by it. If this kind of remembering sounds like what psychotherapy is all about, it is because of course it is, but I think it is also what the forgiveness of sins is all about—the interplay of God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of God and each other (TS 32-33).

As writers, both Lewis and Buechner reveal the pain of familial loss in their books. For Lewis the ripples extend to Digory in *The Magician's Nephew* who wishes more than anything to help his mother live and through obedience succeeds. Later using a pseudonym, Lewis writes *A Grief Observed* after the death of his wife. For Buechner, a more unconscious mechanism is at work—in each of his early novels, a suicide occurs before or during the narrative, which the characters seek to work through. In some of his later novels such as *Godric*, the longing for a father is a major theme. As Buechner was later to learn, although death had ended his father's life, it had not ended his relationship with his father which would need prayer, therapy, and his novel about a medieval saint to heal.

*Godric*, the story of a twelfth-century English saint, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1981. By many it is considered his best novel. In his most self-revealing, psychologically-oriented memoir *Telling Secrets*, Buechner describes how writing the novel *Godric* brought him "a sharper glimpse than I had ever had before of the crucial role my father has always played in my life and continues to play in my life" (TS 21). Describing the novel as written during one of the darkest periods of his life, he relates his identification with Godric's grief "for having lost a father I never knew."

> I did not realize until after I wrote it how much of this [the crucial role my father has always played in my life] there is in the book. When Godric is about to leave home to make his way in the world and his father Aedlward raises his hand to him in farewell, Godric says, "I believe my way went from that hand as a path goes from a door, and though many a mile that way has led me since, with many a turn and crossroad in between, if ever I should trace it back, it's to my father's hand that it would lead." And later, when he learns of his father's death, he says, "The sadness was I'd lost a father I had never fully found. It's like a tune that ends before you've heard it out. Your whole life through you search to catch the strain, and seek the face you've lost in strangers' faces." In writing passages like that, I was writing more than I had known I knew with the result that the book was not only a word *from* me—my words painstakingly chosen and arranged into sentences by me alone—but also a word out of such a deep and secret part of who I am that it seemed also a word *to* me.
>
> A book you write out of the depths of who you are, like a dream you dream out of those same depths, is entirely your own creation. All the words your characters speak are words that you alone have put into their mouths, just as every situation they become involved in is one that you along have concocted for them. But it seems to me nonetheless that a book you write, like a dream you dream, can have more healing and truth and wisdom in it at least for yourself than you feel in any way responsible for.
>
> A large part of the truth that *Godric* had for me was the truth that although death ended my father, it has never ended my relationship with my father—a secret that I had never so clearly understood before. So forty-four years after the last time I saw him, it was to my father that I dedicated the book—*In memoriam patris mei*. I wrote the dedication in Latin solely because at the time it seemed appropriate to the medieval nature of the tale, but I have come to suspect since that Latin was also my unconscious way of remaining obedient to the ancient family law that the secret of my father must be at all costs kept secret (TS 21-22).

The central theme of the novel is the ambivalence of love and friendship which effects every relationship. This is not only true of Godric's father who by always working to provide for his family, neglects them emotionally. Early in the novel, Godric leaves his sister behind because he loves her and he fears his love would corrupt her if she accompanied him. After becoming a confident of the Lady Hedwic, Godric abandons her fearing her husband's jealousy would endanger her. Every time his ailing friend the Abbot Ailred coughs, Godric feels the pain as if it were his own. And in the end, Godric and his sister must part because their love only increases the wounds they feel. In the first chapter, Godric poignantly asks, "What's friendship, when all's done, but the giving and taking of wounds?" (7). This painful recognition leads the aged Godric to pray, "Gentle Jesu, Mary's son, be thine the wounds that heal our wounding. Press thy bloody scars to ours that thy dear blood may flow in us and cleanse our sin" (7-8). Responding to the emotional pain of his hurt trail, Godric seeks transference to the wounds of Christ for healing of memories and forgiveness of sin. Christ is the wounded healer, a picture of what Godric is also becoming.

Buechner states that writing the novel *Godric* "saved his sanity" during one of the darkest periods of his life. During that period his daughter almost succumbed to anorexia and had to be hospitalized. Looking at the novel, one can see the outworking of Buechner's personal experience. Far more central to the novel than Godric's father is his sister Burcwen. For Burcwen, Godric is a father figure as well as a brother (she is much younger and looks up to Godric). The central wounding of the narrative that causes Godric the most pain is his excessive love for his young sister, a love that in the novel culminates in incest. Her codependency and fusion with Godric and the severe anorexia that she develops in response to this relationship parallels Buechner's own obsession with his daughter at the time he wrote the book. This is not to suggest that the novel "reveals" that Buechner committed incest with his daughter. Far more probable is the author's subconscious metaphorical instinct which translated an emotional fusion into its most dramatic expression. Throughout the novel the imagery of starvation is prevalent, and the descriptions of Burcwen's anorexia are almost verbatim the words he uses to describe his daughter in the memoir *Telling Secrets.*

What ultimately is striking about Buechner's best work is the depth of characters that assume a life of their own. For Buechner, "Godric was my saint," an historical person with whom he identified. Buechner has defamiliarized his protagonist, locating him in a different time, setting, and even language from his own. Sometimes an author can be too involved, creating a thinly disguised autobiography rather than fiction, but in *Godric* Buechner has created a kind of "objective correlative" for his own experience. That which is most personal is most universal.

Concluding his second memoir *Now and Then*, Buechner describes the creative process as he wrote *Godric* which cannot be separated from the word *mystery*:

> Godric came as mysteriously alive for me as Bebb had and, with him, all the people he knew and the whole medieval world he lived in. I had Godric narrate his own life, and despite the problem of developing a language that sounded authentic on his lips without becoming impenetrably archaic, and despite the difficulties of trying to recapture a time and place so unlike my own, the book, like *Lion Country* before it, came so quickly and with such comparative ease that there were times when I suspected that maybe the old saint himself was not entirely uninvolved in the process, as, were I a saint and were somebody writing a book about me, I would not be entirely uninvolved in the process either.
>
> All sorts of adventures are described in the book because Godric's life was full of adventures, and I followed his life as accurately as I could; but Godric is a very old man as he tells his tale, and old age and the approach of death are very much in the back of his mind throughout. In this sense I think it was a book as prophetic, for me, as the Bebb books had been. It was prophetic in the sense that in its pages, more than half without knowing it, I was trying on various ways of growing old and facing death myself. As the years go by, Godric outlives, or is left behind by, virtually everybody he has ever loved—his sister, Burcwen; his shipmate, Roger Mouse; the two snakes, Tune and Fairweather, who for years were his constant companions; and the beautiful maid, Gillian, who appeared to him on the way back from his pilgrimage to Rome. But, although not without anguish, he is able to let them all go finally and to survive their going. His humanity and wit survive. His faith survives. He prays. He sins. He dreams. And one day not long before his death—bathing in the icy waters of the river Wear as for years he has bathed there, summer and winter, to chasten his flesh—he feels his arms and legs go numb, his pulse all but stop, and speaks these words both for himself and also for me:
>
> > "Praise, praise!" I croak. Praise God for all that's holy, cold, and dark. Praise him for all we lose, for all the river of the

> years bears off. Praise him for stillness in the wake of pain. Praise him for emptiness. And as your race to spill into the sea, praise him yourself, old Wear. Praise him for dying and the peace of death (Godric 96) (NT 107).

> What's lost is nothing to what's found," as Godric says, "and all the death that ever was, set next to life, would scarcely fill a cup" (Godric 96) (NT 109).

In the final scene in the River Wear, Godric releases his burdens, finding peace and joy. In accepting and letting go of his many losses, he makes space for the love of God. *Godric* is a novel that deals with overcoming loss and finding life's meaning in spite of pain. Buechner's unconscious psychological and spiritual struggles, when compressed and molded in the forge of the creative process, have produced a literary gem.

Both Lewis and Buechner benefited from a classical education where they were exposed to the best writers of English literature. Like C.S. Lewis, Buechner was sent to boarding school, but for him it was a positive experience. Although he was dreadfully homesick the first year, he adapted to the academic challenges of Lawrenceville, an all boys preparatory school. There Buechner found life long friends, such as James Merrill, and inspiring English teachers. By the age of 15 he knew he wanted to become a writer.

In the final section of *Sacred Journey* called "Beyond Time," Buechner relates his experience at Princeton, his father's alma mater, where he was an English major, studying British and American literature. In the Wheaton archives I came across Buechner's Princeton notebooks. Although Buechner was a excellent student, on occasion his mind wandered, and the artist in Buechner emerged. Doodles from his Princeton class notes paint a vivid picture of the atmosphere of the classroom, where Professor R.P. Blackmur shared the New Criticism and Buechner expressed his literary skills to the acclaim of his professors. As a student at Oxford, Lewis was a confirmed atheist, but remarks he was drawn to the writings of Christians in spite of their faith. For Buechner though not religious, glimmerings of spirituality are revealed in his doodles. Pictures of stairways, a cross, a serpent, a die of chance, are randomly juxtaposed with the class notes about the Cerebral Cortex (spelled Kortex). And in the midst is a large pointillist face, with eyes raised—icon like. Perhaps a saint? Perhaps a self-portrait? When seen next to photographs of Buechner in his twenties, there is a striking similarity.

Like Lewis's affinity for medieval and renaissance literature, Buechner recalls he "had a love affair with the 17th century" and he too discovered the riches of Milton's *Paradise Lost* from which he chose the title of his first novel *A Long Day's Dying* which he started writing during his senior year. Writing thirty years later in his memoir *Sacred Journey*, Buechner explains why he chose this title in terms of the psychological interaction of his novel's alienated characters:

> I took the title from a passage in Paradise Lost where Adam says to Eve that their expulsion from Paradise "will prove no sudden but a slow pac'd evil,/ A long day's dying to augment our pain," and with the exception of the old lady Maroo, what all the characters seem to be dying of is loneliness, emptiness, sterility, and such preoccupation with themselves and their own problems that they are unable to communicate with each other about anything that really matters to them very much. I am sure that I chose such a melancholy theme partly because it seemed effective and fashionable, but I have no doubt that, like dreams generally, it also reflected the way I felt about at least some dimension of my own life and the lives of those around me (SJ 98).

Published in 1950 when Buechner was 23, this modernist novel dealing with alienation in an Ivy league setting met critical acclaim and its author was heralded as a young Henry James. It was reviewed in *Life*, *Time* and *Newsweek* and was on *The New York Time's* best sellers list. In the novel a third-person omniscient narrator reveals how the characters seek to listen to their past and present experiences. Through self-examination and introspection they listen to themselves in a haphazard way, without the psychological or spiritual understanding of the protagonists in the later novels, but their impulse to listen to their lives to discern meaning is the same.

Looking back at his Princeton days, Buechner recalls being drawn to the great writers of the seventeenth century for their wonderful use of language "but I could not entirely overlook the fact that what they were using their extraordinary language to describe was again and again their experience of the Extraordinary itself, and that this was the source as well as the subject of their unparalleled eloquence" (SJ 92). Lewis similarly describes literary readings in English literature which "baptized his imagination," preparing him for the spiritual revelation which was to come.

Even more than the similarities in their early life, conversion to Christianity links C.S. Lewis and Frederick Buechner as "friends." For Lewis, the process of conversion involved lengthily discussions with believing friends, coming to theistic belief and then a final surrender to Christ which he recounts in *Surprised by Joy*. For 27-year-old Buechner, conversion came as he listened to a sermon preached by George Buttrick in

Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York. As Buechner recounts:

> "What drew me . . . was whatever it was that his sermons came from and whatever it was in me that they touched so deeply. And then there came one particular sermon . . . Jesus Christ refused the crown that Satan offered him in the wilderness, Buttrick said, but he is king nonetheless because again and again he is crowned in the heart of the people who believe in him. And that inward coronation takes place, Buttrick said, "among confession, and tears, and great laughter."
>
> It was the phrase *great laughter* that did it, did whatever it was that I believe must have been hiddenly in the doing all the years of my journey up till then. It was not so much that a door opened as that I suddenly found that a door had been open all along which I had only just then stumbled upon. . . . that what I found finally was Christ. Or was found. It hardly seem to matter which. There are other words for describing what happened to me—psychological words, historical words, poetic words—but in honesty as well as in faith I am reduced to the word that is his name because no other seems to account for the experience so fully (*Sacred Journey* 109-111).

"Surprised by joy" could well be a phrase used to describe Buechner's conversion that Sunday. The following week, Buechner made an appointment with Buttrick to learn more about what had apparently happened, and by the following year Buechner was enrolled in Union Seminary where his formal theological education began in earnest. Buechner's second memoir *Now and Then: A Memoir of Vocation* recounts his seminary years, ordination as a Presbyterian "evangelist/apologist," where he sought to "defend the faith against its 'cultured despisers' as Chaplain at Phillips Exeter Academy. While at Exeter he delivered sermons, still in print and recently reissued by Harper and Row as *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (2006). He also published his first overtly Christian novel, *The Final Beast*.

After nine years at Exeter, during which time he developed the Religion Department, Buechner decided to become a full time writer. Much like the first time he tried to do this, he had a very difficult time, but then came *Alphabet of Grace* which embodied his theme listening to life.

While both Lewis and Buechner have written in multiple genres including autobiography, apologetics, sermons, fiction of all types, what is most remarkable is their ways with words. Form *Mere Christianity* to his fantasies for children and adults, Lewis is often quoted as is Frederick Buechner. Ever popular are the lexicons in which Buechner gives common words a surprising twist. For example:

> ANGER:
> Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you (*Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, 2).

BUECHNER:
It is my name. It is pronounced Beekner. If somebody mispronounces it in some foolish way, I have the feeling that what's foolish is me. If somebody forgets it, I feel that it's I who am forgotten. There's something about it that embarrasses me in just the same way that there's something about me that embarrasses me. I can't imagine myself with any other name—Held, say, or Merrill, or Hlavacek. If my name were different, I would be different. When I tell somebody my name, I have given him a hold over me that he didn't have before. If he calls it out, I stop, look, and listen whether I want to or not.

In the Book of Exodus, God tells Moses that his name is Yahweh, and God hasn't had a peaceful moment since (*Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* 12).

PSYCHOTHERAPY:
After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, God came strolling through the cool of the day and asked them two questions: "Where are you?" and "What is this that you have done?" Psychotherapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and the like have been asking the same ones ever since.

"Where are you?" lays bare the present. They are in hiding, that's where they are. What is it they want to hide? From whom do they want to hide it? What does it cost them to hide it? Why are they so unhappy with things as they are that they are trying to conceal it from the world by hiding, and from themselves by covering, their nakedness with aprons?

"What is this that you have done?" lays bare the past. What did they do to get this way? What did they hope would happen by doing it? What did they fear would happen? What did the serpent do? What was it that made them so ashamed?

God is described as cursing them then, but in view of his actions at the end of the story and right on through the end of the New Testament, it seems less a matter of vindictively inflicting them with the consequences than of honestly confronting them with the consequences. Because of who they are and what they have done, this is the result. There is no undoing it. There is no going back to the garden.

> But then comes the end of the story where God with his own hands makes them garments of skins and clothes them. It is the most moving part of the story. They can't go back, but they can go forward clothed in a new way—clothed, that is, not in the sense of having their old defenses again behind which to hide who they are and what they have done but in the sense of having a new understanding of who they are and a new strength to draw on for what lies before them to do now.
>
> Many therapists wouldn't touch biblical teachings with a ten-foot pole, but in their own way, and at their best, they are often following them (*Whistling in the Dark: A Doubter's Dictionary* 105-106).

From his later fiction such as *Godric*, nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1981, to his psychological account of Jacob in *The Son of Laughter*, which received the fiction prize for 1993 from *Christianity Today* and the conference on Christianity and Literature, psychological and spiritual insights are organically fused in his writings. Not that the central characters find a good therapist and solve their issues, but that they experience healing in their lives which involves listening to their lives, responding to God's questions and finding his presence as the answer.

C.S. Lewis and Frederick Buechner share similar life experience, scholarly training, Christian apologetics, a Christian world view articulated through sermons and lectures, philosophical writings and imaginative, often humorous fiction. What are their differences? For Buechner psychotherapy is an effective and even essential aid to his spiritual life. Lewis tends to see psychoanalysis (which was the main form of therapy in his day) as a specialized medical procedure needed to heal abnormal conditions. Lewis states:

> What psychoanalysis undertake to do is to remove the abnormal feelings, that is, to give the man better raw material for his acts of choice: morality is concerned with the acts of choice themselves . . . . But psychoanalysis itself, apart from all the philosophical additions that Freud and other have made to it, is not in the least contradictory to Christianity. Its technique overlaps with Christian morality at some points and it would not be a bad thing if every parson knew something about it (*Mere Christianity* 84).

Another difference is their approach to issues of faith and doctrine. Whereas Lewis provides answers, Buechner suggests possibilities. Lewis is straight forward, Buechner throws a curve ball. And yet, they usually come to the same conclusion, trusting the love

that will not let them go. C.S. Lewis's famous quote from *Till We Have Faces* beautifully expresses Frederick Buechner's perspective on the mystery: "I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away." (*Faces* 308).

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## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# The Wardrobe, the Witch and the Lion

Louis A. Markos

"In these days of wars and rumors of wars—haven't you ever dreamed of a place where there was peace and security, where living was not a struggle but a lasting delight?" With this question, Frank Capra begins his great epic film, *Lost Horizons*. Based on the novel by James Hilton, Capra's film transports a group of displaced pilgrims from the war-torn Chinese city of Baskul to the mystical land of Shangri-la. After being kidnapped by a seemingly mad pilot and then crash landing on the snowy summit of an inaccessible mountain in Tibet, our pilgrims trudge their way up a treacherous, frozen path, turn a corner, and . . . gaze down into a green and fertile valley. It is one of the most magical moments in film history.

In the 2005 screen version of C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, director Andrew Adamson allows us to experience this same transition from a world of war and madness to a land of wonder and magic. Although Lewis tells us in Chapter One that the four Pevensie children are evacuees from London, the film allows us to witness (in realistic and even harrowing detail) both the bombing of London by Nazi planes and the difficult separation of the four children from their mother. The world these children are fleeing, the film makes clear, is truly one of wars and rumors of wars, a world of struggle that offers neither peace nor security. Even the cynical viewer who would dismiss fantasy as mere "escapism" would have to admit that this is a world to escape from. The starkness of the opening scenes makes the moment when Lucy (and later her siblings) pushes her way through a musty old wardrobe into a snowy Narnian wood all the more enchanting and breathtaking. Here, surely, is a place of rest. Or is it?

Narnia, as it turns out, is going through its own version of World War II, with a totalitarian White Witch who would devour the freedom of Narnia and a noble Lion (a symbol for Christ but also the symbol for England) who will, like Winston Churchill, stand alone if he must against the Witch's tyranny. It is a vital part of both novel and film that the danger of Narnia becomes apparent quite quickly; neither we nor the children are given the luxury to tiptoe through the tulips of a restored Eden. The children must fight for their Shangri-la with the same dedication and faith as their father back home is fighting for the freedom of England: a point that is latent in the book but is made much more strongly and clearly in the film through the addition of some well written, pointed dialogue.

Narnia is as much worth fighting for as England, and the stakes are just as high. Neither the European nor the Narnian war is a mere matter of trading rights or border disputes; it is about good versus evil, freedom versus slavery, light versus darkness. In Narnia, however, those sides are more distinct, embodied not only in Aslan and the White Witch but in their individual followers. As they did for The Lord of the Rings trilogy, WETA Workshop has crafted creatures that convey by their outward appearance the virtue or vice of their inner nature. It is thrilling, in a modern age that has increasingly caved in to moral relativism, to see a film that so clearly takes delight in crafting a world of moral certainty. That, of course, is not to say that either novel or film gives us simple, cardboard good guys and bad guys. Novel and film present us with both a collaborator turned patriot (Tumnus) and a good English boy who gives in to envy and despair and turns traitor (Edmund). And the film goes one better than Lewis. Not only is the character of Tumnus skillfully

fleshed out (he is the son of a dead "resistance fighter"; his decision not to turn over Lucy is partly influenced by a brief, powerful encounter he has with Aslan; he ends up in the same dungeon with Edmund but shows himself more loyal), but the film adds a second character, a quick-witted fox who works in the Narnian "underground" and dies a martyr.

In such a world, it will not do for the Pevensie children (even Lucy) to remain innocent of the opposing natures of good and evil. They must understand what is at stake, and they must take sides. They must become heroes and heroines; indeed, they must become kings and queens. (Perhaps influenced by the first Harry Potter novel/film, Adamson, unlike Lewis, has the loyal Narnians immediately begin to treat the Pevensies as though they were kings and queens from the outset.) Adamson's children (as opposed to Lewis's) are not only given more chances to display courage, but engage in a fuller dialogue (both external and internal) on the nature of heroism. One of the best bits of "added dialogue" occurs when Peter is about to fight Maugrim the wolf (chief henchman of the Witch's Gestapo-like secret police). Susan, justifiably afraid that her brother will be killed, cries out to him that just because Father Christmas gave him a sword, that does not make him a hero. Adamson also develops further the strength that the Pevensies take from their unity as a family. He retains Professor Kirke's "liar/lunatic/lord" argument in the beginning of the film (either Lucy is crazy, lying, or telling the truth about her trip to Narnia), but has Kirke add that Peter and Susan should also trust Lucy because they are family. This focus on family trust and unity is established in the opening scene when Mrs. Pevensie makes Peter promise to protect his three younger siblings (also not in the novel). Peter stays true to this promise, and Adamson even inserts several brief episodes in which Peter tries to make his siblings return to England and safety while he remains behind to fulfil his obligations to Narnia.

All this is to say that the film's development of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy is in many ways better than the novel (though the particularly moral and theological dimensions of Edmund's temptation, sin, and betrayal are muted and even somewhat muddled). We truly experience and believe Peter's transformation into a knight as we do Susan's overcoming of her skepticism and fear and Edmund's sincere repentance and maturation into a brave and selfless warrior. We also sense more powerfully than in the novel the danger that the children are in. And yet, this well-handled development of the children, which marks (along with the excellent portrayal of the Witch and the brilliant realizations of the Narnian landscapes and characters) the film's greatest strength, is also its greatest weakness.

For the expansion of the children's characters and roles comes at a very high price: the lessening of the character and role of Aslan. The shift in emphasis becomes immediately apparent in the dinner scene with the Beavers. Lewis provides us with two prophetic rhymes: one about Aslan ("Wrong will be right / when Aslan comes in sight," etc.), that is recited first and that is given far more prominence, and one about the children ("When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone," etc.). Adamson eliminates the first altogether and then makes it seem as if the prophecy about the children is the central and most important prophecy: the one that the Narnians have most been longing for. In addition, most of the information that the Beavers share about Aslan is left out (including the vital fact that he is the Son of the Emperor Beyond the Sea). We are not even told that he is a lion (which eliminates Edmund's true reason for drawing a charcoal mustache on the stone lion he sees in the courtyard of the Witch's castle)! The messianic hope that surrounds the return of Aslan is transferred almost completely to the children; it is as if Aslan is linked to the prophecy of the children, rather than the children being linked to the prophecy of Aslan.

But the weakness in the film's portrayal of Aslan's goes far beyond the trimming down of the scene with the Beavers. It is bad enough that the audience is not properly "warmed up" for the arrival of Aslan; when Aslan does in fact arrive on the scene, he is a shadow of what he is in the novel (and in the hearts of all lovers of the books). The computer animation for Aslan is excellent, and the range of facial expressions (though rarely and not too effectively used) is admirable, but Aslan himself evokes little awe or reverence. Except in the well-shot (and well-lit) scene when we see the newly-risen Lion, Aslan is just not majestic or powerful enough; Liam Neeson's voicing of Aslan also lacks the necessary depth and resonance. In neither form nor voice does Aslan overwhelm us as he should; he is not even backed up with an appropriate orchestral score that would help engrave his image in our subconscious (compared to the stirring scores that accompany the Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter films, the score for this film is an almost complete disappointment).

One of C.S. Lewis's key purposes in writing not only *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* but the Chronicles as a whole was to provide his child (and adult) readers with something that our age has lost: a sense of the numinous, of the holy, of the sacred. Again and again in the Chronicles we are told that when the children meet Aslan, they realize for the first time that something can be *both* beautiful and terrible, both exhilarating and scary. When they first stand before the Lion, they are filled with joy, but their knees go "trembly." Though Adamson does, thankfully, include Lewis's key observation that Aslan is not a tame lion, but he is good, he doesn't include it until Aslan is about to disappear from the screen, and he does not adequately visualize this aspect of Aslan's nature in the course of the film. He also diminishes Aslan in another way. Though the film retains Aslan's definition of the Deeper Magic, it leaves out his explanation that the

Witch's knowledge only goes back to the dawn of time, but his (by implication) goes back before the beginning. Likewise, though we are told that Aslan comes and goes (he is not a tame lion), we are not told that he has other countries to attend to. In the place of Lewis's eternal Lion, we are given something like the "historical Aslan."

Most disappointing of all, the film leaves out the richly cinematic episode, directly after his resurrection, when Aslan wrestles with the girls on the grass. "It was," Lewis writes in Chapter XV, "such a romp as no one has ever had except in Narnia; and whether it was more like playing with a thunderstorm or playing with a kitten Lucy could never make up her mind." Perhaps no episode in the book better illustrates Lewis's insistence that Aslan is someone to be loved and caressed but never trifled with. We *are* given the scene which directly follows (when the girls ride on his back to the Witch's castle), but the scene is terribly truncated and another chance to capture on film Aslan's overwhelming power is lost (my son was particularly disappointed that the film left out the thrilling moment in the book when Aslan, with the girls still on his back, leaps in a single bound over the high wall that surrounds the locked castle). The film also allows Aslan to let out his victorious roar, but even this moment lacks force, power, and conviction.

Still, although the film's Aslan is stripped of much of his awe and radiance, he *does* do all of the things that Lewis has him do in the novel. The film works out the full "sacred drama" of Aslan, giving us both his death and resurrection and explaining well the distinction between the Deep Magic and the Deeper Magic; it even includes a clear sense that the Deep Magic (the Law) is something that both defines good and evil and that must at times be appeased by sacrifice. As for the Deeper Magic, Aslan is given a good added line when he says that the Witch did not understand the true nature of sacrifice. The film also provides us with a single, wordless shot that will, I believe, remain indelible in the memories of those who see the film. The moment comes when Edmund has been rescued and is speaking alone with Aslan on a hill; in the posture and lighting of the scene, we sense powerfully the forgiveness that Aslan is extending to Edmund and the way in which that forgiveness is already changing Edmund from within. A similar shot that lingers in the mind is the image of Susan and Lucy curled up together on the Stone Table with the dead body of Aslan. All the grief of the moment, all the loss of hope and the longing for the loved one dead is conveyed in a few seconds of film. Had there been more scenes like these in the film, the fuller dimensions of Aslan that all but embrace us when we read the novels (or listen to the excellent radio play version produced by Focus on the Family) might have made their way more effectively into the film. Indeed, though Lucy *is* handled well in the film, the diminishing of Aslan means that we miss out on one of the key aspects of her character: her sensitivity to the moods of Aslan and her deep, intimate connection with the Lion. In the absence of a truly mystical Lion, we lose our sense of Lucy as a mystic.

As for the "crucifixion" scene, it is done as well as it possibly could be (though Lewis's altar-like Stone Table is turned into a platform-like stage). The filmmakers should be commended for making a scene that can be viewed by adults and children alike and that will fill both with a sense of dread and fear (the same goes for the well-executed battle scenes). The Witch's gloating speech over Aslan as she is about to kill him is powerfully staged and performed, and is made even more effective by an added touch of cinematic bravura: after she kills Aslan, the Witch's eyes seem to turn black. Again, it must be emphasized that the film is faithful to Lewis's Narnian Gospel story, but that story has far less impact because Aslan is first denied his majestic build up in the conversation at the home of the Beavers, and then is not allowed to exude holiness or provoke awe in the scenes leading up to his death and resurrection.

Why, the viewer (and reviewer) must inevitably ask, is Aslan's character so shorn of its glory and power? One would have to be naïve not to lay the blame for this muting of the fullness of Aslan partly (if not in great part) on the filmmakers' fear of seeming to press the link between Aslan and Christ. This is surely the reason for denying Aslan his eternal nature and his status as the Son of the Emperor. But it may also be due to the director's memory of first reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when he was a child (Adamson has stated that he wanted to capture his memory of that experience on film). Perhaps what really drew the young Adamson to the novel in the first place was the land of Narnia itself and the adventures of the four children rather than Aslan per se. Adamson certainly lavishes considerable care on Narnia and its various set pieces, and audiences of all ages should be enchanted. He also, as we have seen, does an excellent job with the four children (all of whom are also well cast and acted). Most viewers will fall in love with Narnia, and for that Adamson, WETA, and all the producers deserve praise. But viewers will not leave the theater feeling the way Lucy does at the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when she tells Aslan that it is not Narnia but *him* whom she truly loves.

And that leads us to a third reason for the diminishment of Aslan. Perhaps our modern age and cinema are not capable of fully conceiving and realizing a character like Aslan. Perhaps Lewis was right that we have lost our ability to perceive of something as being both beautiful and terrible, that we have lost (really lost) our sense of the sacred. "When they tried to look at Aslan's face," writes Lewis in Chapter XII, "they just caught a glimpse of the golden mane and the great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes; and then they found they couldn't look at him and went all trembly." Does

there lurk in this sentence a kind of real magic that our modern world, that not even the Hollywood Dream Factory, can capture or understand?

If so, we had better start reading our Lewis again . . . and our Bibles.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# The Good Guys and the Bad Guys: Teachable Moments in the Chronicles of Narnia

Louis A. Markos

Though I enjoy, now and then, visiting the local Cineplex with my wife and two children, I really much prefer to screen films in the privacy of our family room. Liberated from the "tyranny of silence" that must (understandably) prevail in a crowded theater, we are left free to intersperse our viewing with an on-going dialogue about the film. As the only teacher in the family (and an English one at that!) I invariably do most of the talking: now guiding the children through the twists and turns of the plot, now highlighting the strengths and flaws of the main characters, now elaborating on the theme or moral of the film. Usually, the kids are eager to join in the dialogue and will often assault me with a barrage of questions. Their questions range from the simple to the complex, the sublime to the ridiculous, but no matter the movie and no matter the mood they are in, there is one question that they always, always ask: "Who are the good guys, and who are the bad guys?"

Now if I were a good modern relativist, I would tell them that words like "good" and "bad" are not fixed terms with a universal, timeless meaning but labels that shift from age to age and culture to culture. If I were a good postmodern multiculturalist, I might add that these labels are not "innocent," but are imposed by powerful, dominant races, classes, and genders, on other races, classes, and genders that they perceive as weaker, less rational, or less civilized. But (thankfully for my children) I am neither. Though I am (as a Christian) well aware that there is no one who liveth and sinneth not and that all men share a propensity for evil, and though I know too that one man's terrorist is often another man's freedom fighter, I am also (as a Christian) convinced that eternal, cross-cultural standards exist by which we can judge certain groups, actions, and motivations as upholding those standards (good) or violating them (bad). True, as fallen creatures living in a fallen world, we must both accept the existence of ambiguity and refrain from judging the hearts of others, but this does not mean that moral certainty is an absolute impossibility. Indeed, I would argue that we are, by nature, ethical animals, endowed not only with the ability to discern right behavior from wrong, but with an innate sense that we ought to embrace the former and shun the latter. (The existence of psychopaths and sociopaths no more invalidates this truth than the existence of paralytics invalidates the fact that our legs were made for walking.) Every child who asks his father to identify for him the good guys and the bad guys is participating, in his own small way, in this in-bred, hard-wired ethical imperative.

If this be so (and I am convinced that it is), then it lies incumbent on all people who interact with the young to so foster and guide them that they will grow to become responsible moral agents: able to distinguish that which is good from that which is evil, that which is virtuous from that which is vicious, that which should (and must) be encouraged if the individual and society are to prosper from that which must be avoided if we and our world are to resist plunging into darkness. If we do not do this (either because we are lazy and apathetic or because we have internalized a modernist/postmodernist agenda), then we abdicate, in part, our roles as parents and educators, as shapers of the hearts, minds, and souls of the young. More than that, we court disaster for ourselves and our nation.

But our task does not end here. It is not enough merely to identify which are the good guys and which the bad. We must teach our children as well *why* the good guys are good and the bad guys are bad. More than that, we must help them to understand the true nature of goodness and evil. It's easy enough for English-speaking children to see that the words "good" and "God" and the words "evil" and "Devil" are

(accidentally, if serendipitously) closely allied in our language. It is more difficult to define for them either the divine qualities that shine through true goodness and make it live or the satanic nature that empowers evil with its own perverse anti-life.

Still, we must try.

Many theories have been put forward to explain the phenomenal success of *The Lord of the Rings* (both Tolkien's three-part novel and the trilogy of films by Peter Jackson). Though no single reason can suffice to account fully for this phenomenon, I would suggest that a key element in the success of Tolkien's epic fantasy is that, in the face of the apparent triumph of relativism, the novels/films present their readers/viewers with a world in which moral certainty is both philosophically possible and practically necessary. Whether between armies and their leaders or within the tempted and tormented souls of the central characters, the battle between good and evil rages with a fury that is as powerful in its dramatic intensity as it is challenging in its ethical clarity. By the end of the novels/films, we feel that we have not only peered deeply into the nature of pure goodness (Sam) and pure evil (Sauron), but that we understand how and why it is that the characters who are pulled in both directions (Saruman, Aragorn, Frodo, Gollum, etc.) follow the paths they do into the darkness or the light.

Yes, *The Lord of the Rings* has proven a godsend for parents who would open their children's eyes to the precise nature of goodness and evil, virtue and vice. And yet, for all its effectiveness at laying bare the exact qualities that distinguish the good guys from the bad guys, it must (I believe) finally take second place to another series of fantasy novels that explores its moral and ethical terrain with even greater precision and insight. I speak, of course, of the seven novels that make up The Chronicles of Narnia, novels written by a man who was not only a life-long friend of Tolkien and a fellow Oxford don, but who shared Tolkien's faith in a Christian worldview. Like Tolkien, C.S. Lewis affirmed the real existence of God and his angels, both the good ones who chose to remain in God's presence, and the evil ones (or devils) who rebelled against God's authority and thereby fell into a state of corruption. He believed as well that man, though created in the image of God and declared by him to be good, has, like the devils, fallen into a state of sin. However, whereas the devils are eternally and irremediably corrupt, a true and titanic struggle between good and evil, the way of God and the way of Satan, rages in the human breast. Alone we cannot win the battle, but God in Christ has provided for us a way of redemption by which we can be freed from the corruption within and participate in the glorious goodness of God. The struggle defines us, in part, as human beings, and is one of the things that distinguishes us from the lower animals. We are the only earthly creatures who possess the knowledge of good and of evil, the only creatures with the capacity both to strive after (and to recognize) goodness and to succumb to the corrupting and finally dehumanizing influence of evil. In the Chronicles, we meet characters who avail themselves of both capacities, who choose paths that draw them either toward that goodness which is most fully embodied in the person of Aslan, the Lion King of Narnia, or toward the evil that dwells in (and possesses) the perverse soul of Jadis, the White Witch.

Though the geography of these dual paths can be traced through all seven of the Chronicles, I will focus in this essay only on *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Here, in the first written and first published of the Chronicles, Lewis sets in motion the moral and ethical trajectory along which all the later novels will travel. He also initiates the second, Christian meaning that underlies all of the Chronicles by replaying, on a different world that runs in accordance with a different time scheme, the redemption story of the Bible.

The novel begins when the four Pevensie children (Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy) enter into the magical world of Narnia (a land of talking animals, living trees, and mythic beasts) through the back of an old wardrobe. Once there, they discover that Narnia has been ruled for a hundred years by the usurping White Witch, who has made it "always winter and never Christmas." When they learn that they have, unwittingly, caused the arrest of Mr. Tumnus, a friendly Narnian faun, they set out to find a way to rescue him. They are taken in by Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, who inform them that though the Witch's power is too great for them to fight alone, the lion Aslan (son of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea) has returned to Narnia and is now "on the move." During dinner with the Beavers, the children learn that their brother Edmund (who, during an earlier visit to Narnia, had been tempted by the Witch's Turkish Delight) has stolen away into the night to betray them to Jadis. Peter, Susan, and Lucy are taken to meet Aslan, who helps them rescue Edmund from the clutches of the Witch and who seems poised to crush her power completely. But there is a complication. According to the Deep Magic of Narnia, the blood of every traitor belongs to the Witch. In order to save Edmund from the Witch, Aslan agrees to offer his own life in the place of the treacherous Edmund. Aslan meekly surrenders himself to the Witch, who shaves, humiliates, and then kills him on the sacrificial Stone Table. The children along with all Narnia now seem doomed, but on the dawn of the next day, the Table cracks and Aslan is restored to life. Susan and Lucy witness both Aslan's death and resurrection. When they ask him how it is that he is now alive again, he tells them that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, she

did not know the Deeper Magic: that if an innocent victim were to die in the stead of a traitor, the Stone Table would crack, and death would begin to work backwards! With Susan and Lucy on his back, Aslan races toward the Witch's castle, in the courtyard of which lie the statues of animals that she has turned to stone with her wand. Aslan breathes on each of the statues, restoring them to life, and then leads his "born-again" army into battle with the Witch. Jadis and her army are defeated, and the children rule Narnia as Kings and Queens for many years, until the White Stag leads them back to the Wardrobe, from which they emerge as children again.

Christian parents who read the *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* with their children will no doubt wish to begin their family discussion by explaining how Lewis's novel retells the Gospel message. Beware, however, that you do not reduce it to *only* an allegory of the Christian story. Emphasize that the characters who act and interact in the novel are "real" characters whose lives have their own integrity and meaning within the frame of the story. Let the drama of the tale (and the luminous "person" of Aslan) exert its full impact on your children before you begin to "unpack" its underlying Christian message. You might explain to them that (to paraphrase a comment from Lewis himself) Aslan is not simply an allegory (or representation) of Christ, but that Aslan is what the Son of God (the Second Person of the Trinity) might have been like had he been incarnated on a magical world of talking animals, living trees, and mythic beasts. If you keep this in mind, though, I think it is "safe" to suggest some simple parallels between the novel and the Gospel.

Edmund, like Adam, has committed an act of disobedient treachery against those whom he should love. (As traitor, he also resembles Judas, but I think the link to Adam is finally more fruitful). As a result of his sinful choice, he is cut off from the fellowship of both his family and of Aslan, and becomes the pawn of the White Witch. Just so, we, like Edmund, are separated from God by sin, and our lives are forfeit to Satan (who, like Jadis, is also the ruler of our fallen world). The situation is one which we (like Edmund) cannot remedy on our own. Our salvation from death (and redemption from the just claim of Satan) can only come by God (the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea) sending his Son (Aslan) to invade our "enemy-occupied" world (Aslan is "on the move") and to take our punishment upon himself by willingly offering up his life on the Cross (the Stone Table). But the story does not end there. Christ (like Aslan) rises again from the dead and thus sets in motion not only our own salvation but that of the whole world.

If the children are still with you, you might try moving on to more sophisticated theological concepts. It is no coincidence that Aslan is killed on a Stone Table which then cracks in two when he rises again. On the simplest level, the cracked Table recalls the stone that rolled away from the tomb at the Resurrection of Christ. On a deeper level, it recalls the Veil in the Temple which miraculously tore in two from top to bottom when Christ was crucified. Historically, the Veil separated the people from the Holy of Holies, that most sacred of places which once had held the Arc of the Covenant and into which the High Priest alone could enter, and on only one day of the year (the Day of Atonement). Since the death of Christ, we no longer need the Veil or the Temple or the High Priest; through the Blood of Christ shed on the Cross, we are all granted direct access to the Holy God. On a yet deeper level, the Stone Table recalls the Tablets of the Law on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. In the Old Testament (before the coming of Christ), the Covenant between God and his people (the Jews) was mediated by the Law of Moses, a law which included the intractable rule that the punishment for sin is death (the Deep Magic). But when Christ died and rose again (the Deeper Magic), the legalistic and condemnatory force of the old law/covenant was broken and grace took its place: a grace which cements the New Covenant (or Testament) between God and the Church.

Finally, if you wish to ratchet it up one more notch, you might discuss how the scene in which Aslan breathes on the statues and restores them to life offers a powerful picture of what it means to have New Life in Christ. Christ (like Aslan) did not simply come back from the dead in the sense of being resuscitated (as Lazarus was); he went *through* death and came out on the other side. In the New Testament, this is made clear by the fact that Christ now wears a Resurrection Body that can "walk through walls" and appear and disappear at will. In Lewis's novel, this is captured in a single powerful detail. Before Aslan is killed, his hair and mane are shaved off. When he resurrects and appears to Susan and Lucy (as Jesus did to the Marys), his mane is not only restored, but is more rich and golden than before. It is suggested (though not clearly stated) in the novel that before his death/resurrection, Aslan did not have the power to breathe on statues and restore them to life. But now that he has himself conquered death and risen anew, he has the power to share that life with anyone he wishes. Just so, the risen Christ has the power to grant us, here and now, a new and more vital life, and, in the age to come, a Resurrection Body like unto his own.

So far so good. If your children get this much out of the novel, they are doing quite well. But I would strongly urge you not to end your discussion here. *The*

*Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* offers the opportunity not only to identify for your children the ultimate good guy (Aslan, Christ) and bad guy (the White Witch, Satan), but, as I suggested earlier, to delve more deeply into the full and true nature of good and evil. Though one can start such a discussion by focusing first on evil and then moving on to good, I would suggest starting with goodness instead. In our culture (and, alas, in our churches), we too often promote a negative view of goodness; we think of it merely as the absence of evil, of a simple restraint from the temptations of the flesh. The truth, of course, is completely the opposite. It is evil that is the negative thing, the falling away, the perversion of a primal and positive goodness. As Lewis teaches us in his non-fiction, there is no such thing as perfect evil: if evil *were* ever to succeed in becoming only evil, it would cease to exist. The hole in a shirt is nothing without the shirt; just so, evil (which Augustine defines as the privation of good) can only exist inasmuch as it preys on and defiles and corrupts something good that God made. (If your children are old enough, here is the time to explain to them that sex is not a bad thing that we must utterly resist in the name of a negative purity, but that sexuality/intimacy is a gift of God that we must be careful not to misuse or defile.)

There are few characters in literature who embody positive goodness more powerfully than Aslan. In his presence, the children feel at once a sense of joy and fear, an ecstasy mingled with terror, an intimation of both the actively sublime and the passively beautiful. Aslan is neither a pretty object to be placed on a shelf, nor a tame pet to be domesticated. He is fierce, wild, and unpredictable. The first time the children hear his name, they are taken out of themselves (the literal meaning of the word ecstasy); when they meet him in person, their legs tremble beneath them. Yes, they are told by the Beavers, he is good and just and loving, but he is by no means safe. He is to be trusted and loved, but not to be trifled with. One might as well try to pet a lion or dance with a tornado. After Aslan rises from the dead and shows himself to the girls, he warns them that they must put their fingers in their ears, for he feels a roar welling up inside of him. Susan and Lucy do as they are told; then, Lewis describes, "Aslan stood up and when he opened his mouth to roar his face became so terrible that [the girls] did not dare to look at it. And they saw all the trees in front of him bend before the blast of his roaring as grass bends in a meadow before the wind" (Chapter XV). The newly risen Aslan is like a hurricane unleashed, a force that both tears away the death imposed on Narnia by the White Witch and ushers in renewal and redemption. In its wake, Spring returns to Narnia.

But Aslan's power does not only manifest itself in his triumph over death, winter, and the Witch. When Aslan surrenders himself to Jadis at the Stone Table, he does so not out of weakness (he is no guilt-ridden doormat) but out of a position of compassionate strength. The kinetic energy released at his resurrection is there throughout the novel in potential form, like a coiled spring ever ready to snap. From the very moment that Aslan learns of the treachery of Edmund, he knows what he must do. The tragic knowledge of his own coming sacrifice weighs heavily on Aslan, but he carries it through to the end, as only one who knows his purpose and embraces it can do. When, after the first shock of Aslan's humiliation passes, and Lucy can bear to look up at him again, she realizes, to her surprise, that "the shorn face of Aslan [now looks] to her braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever" (Chapter XIV).

Lewis felt that the children (and adults) of his day had lost what he liked to call (after Rudolph Otto) a sense of the numinous: a sense of awe or dread that mingles terror with beauty and that makes one feel small and insignificant (but not repulsive or suicidal) in the face of a transcendent force. It is the dulling of this sense in Lewis's day (and our own) that accounts for what many modern writers have called the loss of the sacred. Lewis was truly concerned (as we should all be) that modern children could no longer conceive of something being both wonderful and terrible, fun and serious at the same time. Aslan *is* that very something, and it was Lewis's hope that if children learned to feel a sense of the numinous in the presence of Aslan they could later transfer that feeling to its proper object: the Triune God of the Bible. I can attest to the power of the Chronicles to do just that every time my family takes a long driving trip and listens to the excellent radio play versions of the Chronicles produced by Focus on the Family. As we listen, the children (or my wife and I) might start talking or drifting into other thoughts, but when Aslan bounds on to the scene, the interior of the car grows still, and a strange awe resonates in the air. A faint (but real) echo of that ecstatic dread that Isaiah and John felt when they stood before the Throne Room of God falls upon us and draws us out of our mundane concerns.

Those characters in the novel who hearken to the numinous presence of Aslan and allow it to transform them find that they are capable of acts of great courage and mercy. Even the treacherous Edmund, changed from within by the awesome love of Aslan, shows himself willing to sacrifice his own life for his friends and for Narnia in the final battle with the Witch. Too often our modern icons of goodness are too weak, passive, and restrained to appeal to the young. Through Aslan, they can learn (and *experience*) a richer, divine

goodness that shatters all boundaries and that has the power to restore, renew, and revive.

When set over against the pulsating goodness of Aslan, the evil of the White Witch and her minions seems, finally, a paltry, petty, lifeless thing. In the *Screwtape Letters*, the senior devil Screwtape explains to his nephew Wormwood (a young, naïve tempter) that the ultimate difference between God and Satan is that the latter wants cattle that he can use for food, while the former wants servants that he can turn into sons. In the triangle that forms between Aslan, Edmund, and the White Witch, we see this truth played out. Jadis tempts Edmund to betray his siblings by promising him that he will reign with her as a Prince and that he will eat all the Turkish Delight that he wants. In reality, the Witch transforms Edmund into a slave whom she insults, abuses, and feeds on stale bread and water. Edmund thinks that the Witch will make him wiser, stronger, and better than his siblings; instead, she reduces him to a thing of little value and no purpose. Under her evil influence, he comes to hate not only his siblings and Aslan but himself. Worse yet, his gluttonous desire for the Witch's Turkish Delight has the effect of ruining for him all other types of joy. As Lewis so simply but profoundly puts it: "there's nothing that spoils the taste of good ordinary food half so much as the memory of bad magic food" (Chapter IX).

It is a sad fact of humanity that most of us (whatever the age or culture in which we were raised) grow up believing a terrible lie: namely, that whereas Satan wants to set us free to be truly ourselves, Christ wants to crush our personality and make us all the same. Allied to this is an equally false belief that Christ is a cosmic killjoy, a joyless Puritan who hates all forms of merriment, revelry, and indulgence. In a memorable, yet easily overlooked scene in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis gives the lie to this satanic propaganda, showing that it is, in fact, the Devil (and not Christ) who is the real killjoy.

Even before his resurrection, Aslan, simply by his presence in Narnia, causes the long winter of the Witch to begin to thaw. In tandem with this breaking of the Witch's icy grip, Aslan's appearance also brings into Narnia the jolly figure of Father Christmas. While on her way to overtake Peter, Susan, and Lucy before they can reach Aslan, the Witch comes upon a party of talking animals who are partaking of a feast provided for them by Father Christmas. When she spies them, the Witch is *not* pleased that they are drinking wine and stuffing themselves with food. Indeed, her response to them is identical to what most Christians *think* (wrongly) is God's default reaction to our earthly pleasures: "'What is the meaning of all this gluttony, this waste, this self-indulgence. Where did you get all these things?'" (Chapter XI). If the Witch had her way, Narnia would not be a land of gluttony and dipsomania, but a cold, dead world inhabited by automatons whose joy and life and potential for growth have been swallowed up by her devouring envy and pride. And for those who refuse to be so emptied of their vitality, the Witch simply turns them into stone statues: which is exactly what she does to the "party animals" she meets on the road.

Though most evangelical Christians point to John 3:16 as their favorite verse, mine has always come from a later Chapter in John: from his beautiful discourse of the Good Shepherd (10:1-18). In verse 10 of this passage, Christ describes, in the most precise way, what the difference is between his own goodness and the evil of Satan (the thief): "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." In its depiction not only of Aslan and the White Witch but of those characters who fall under their sway, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* offers a veritable dramatization of this key verse. And, by so doing, it offers as well one of the classic responses to that perennial question: "Who are the good guys, and who are the bad guys?"

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# MacDonald's Theology and his Fantasy Fiction

Colin Manlove

Though they have understandably received far less attention from literary critics than his fiction, George MacDonald's theological works—his three series of *Unspoken Sermons* (1867, 1885,1889), *The Miracles of Our Lord* (1870), *The Hope of the Gospel* (1892) and the twenty spoken sermons and addresses recently selected in *George MacDonald in the Pulpit* (1996)[1]—afford a fascinating insight into his mind, and throw considerable light on his fantasy.[2] In these lectures I want to give a sketch of some of their more prominent features, and then suggest what they can tell us about his fiction.

The striking aspect of MacDonald's theological work is the way he has come to his own understanding of Christianity without reference to churches or creeds. And this from his earliest days as a Christian; writing to his father in 1851 he declared,

> We are far too anxious to be definite and to have finished, well-polished systems—forgetting that the more perfect a theory about the infinite, the surer it is to be wrong, the more impossible it is to be right. I am neither Arminian nor Calvinist. To no system would I subscribe. (*GMDW*, 155)

This determination, and his supposed heterodoxy, were to lead to his expulsion as minister of Arundel Congregational Church in 1853. But in MacDonald's view, systems and beliefs could only talk about or define one's relationship to God, they could not know that relation. Indeed he maintained that

> One chief cause of the amount of unbelief in the world is, that those who have seen something of the glory of Christ, set themselves to theorise about him rather than to obey him. In teaching men, they have not taught them Christ, they have taught them about Christ. (*US*, 520)

Macdonald felt with all his soul that Christianity was not a collection of beliefs, but essentially a way of experiencing God. For him, coming into harmony with God's love and purpose in both himself and the world was the key concern of a Christian. His Christianity is mystical and moral together, involving both loving knowledge of God's ways, and walking in them.

Theologically MacDonald is a 'deconstructionist.' He wants to take away the fixed and hard edifices of doctrine, even the fixed and hard constructs that are churches themselves, to arrive at the living fire at the heart of Christianity. Declaring that 'Theologians have done more to hide the gospel of Christ than any of its adversaries' (*US*, 259), he calls fixed dogmas 'the theology of hell' (*GMP*, 41), and says, 'The world in which you move, the place of your living and loving and labour, not the church you go to on your holiday, is the place of divine service' (*US*, 592; see also 615 and *LE*, 30). MacDonald himself did not have a built or formal life as a Christian. He spent his whole Christian life undoing what he saw as the harmful forms and antagonisms man had over the centuries built on the plain ground of what Jesus was and taught.[3] He believed in a creedless Christianity available to all men and women through a simple choice to love and follow Christ. Such a faith had nothing to do with sects of belief or churches, and its truth was no less real in his own time of scientific skepticism than in the time of Christ's life and persecution on earth.

MacDonald's view of the Bible is important here, for the Bible is the template of the Christian faith. For MacDonald the Bible is a central text by the light of which to know what God wants, to understand and to follow Christ, and to find out heaven. This purpose he finds contained within the Gospels, in the account of Christ's life and His continually tested loyalty to God. All MacDonald's thinking is founded on the Gospels and Christ: 'I believe in nothing but the Lord revealed in Christ' (*GMP* 20; see also 28). MacDonald has little to say in his writings of other books of the Bible, and indeed the Old Testament features only in an account of Job's arguments with God, because it is a singular example of man trying to relate to God ('The Voice of Job,' *US*, 328-62).

And for MacDonald it is mistaken to give the Bible the authority of *the* Word of God: 'It nowhere lays claim to be regarded as *the* Word, *the* Way, *the* Truth'; for 'The one use of the Bible is to make us look [beyond it] at Jesus' (*US*, 36, 37; see also 95-6). In any case, fogged as it is by two millennia of the varying psyches and understandings of its composers,

transliterators and translators, it cannot any longer claim to be the Word of God, even supposing it had once been so. And further, much of the Bible is for MacDonald, 'only a way of putting it.' Nothing can adequately describe God or Christ in their divinity (see for example 'The Temptation in the Wilderness,' *US*, 84-109; also *US*, 441, *LE*, 56)), though parables best glance at it (*US*, 86-9, 261). Even words themselves break under the weight of the profound meanings Christ gives them. The inarticulate child and the striving Christian are nearer to the truth, because the one sees the universe as a wonder, and the other understands by obeying: 'It is he that runneth that shall read, and no other' (*US*, 260). MacDonald sees God as caring for live things and truths, 'not things set down in a book, or in a memory' (*US*, 566). This view is reflected in MacDonald's own little bibles, his mystical fantasies, where, to avoid all fixities, he makes their words and images suggestive rather than definite, and their meanings potentially as varied as their readers (*ADO*, 313-22). The truest word, and the profoundest book, is that which is continually fluid, or self-subverting.

This is also seen in MacDonald's dislike of the analytic methods of the scientist, which he sees as probing beneath the divine surface of creation (*US*, 439, 469), as dividing one thing of God's creation from another, and as turning living truth to dead particulars: '"What in the name of God . . . is the analysis of water to the babble of a living stream?"'[4] 'Analysis,' he declares, 'is well, as death is well' (*US*, 464). No words about Christ, or His work, or about Christian belief, are in themselves important (*US*, 350)—their sole use if any is in bringing us to do the will of the Father. This loving walking in God's ways is the core of the Christian life and nothing else matters beside it. The only way to *know* God is to love and obey Him.[5]

In keeping with his rejection of Christian dogma and creed, and in common with other liberal theologians of his day such as F.D.Maurice, MacDonald tends to a 'demythologised' view of Christianity. That is, he does not assert—though he never openly denies—an objective pattern of events from the Creation, through the Fall of Man, and Christ's life and death to the Last Judgement. Using the findings of science to spiritual purpose, he sees creation as 'beginning' far back in time, as evolutionary rather than simultaneous, and as not yet complete (*US*, 290,298); (Though since God continually thinks the universe into being (*GMP*, 106), that far-off time and our own are as one in His mind.) Nowhere in MacDonald's work is there a sustained account of man having been once in a paradise, which he lost by giving way to an evil force called Satan. Rather, for MacDonald the picture is one of God repeatedly creating men as separate wills from His own, so that they may of their own choices turn their hearts towards or away from Him, (*US*, 117-18).

Evil lies in failing to do this, in preferring lesser goods before God. Therefore MacDonald does not see our nature as inherently fallen through Adam (*US*, 343,385), but views each of us as capable of enacting our own fall away from God in each moment of our spiritual lives. For Him evil does not lie in our past sins, but in our present choices: 'It is not the sin that I have done, it is the sin that I am. No man was ever yet condemned for the sins that he has done, he is condemned because he will not leave them' (*GMP*, 298).[6]

In the same way Macdonald does not tend to see evil as an objective force outside man, the product of a group of former angels who rebelled against God and were cast out. Rather he sees evil as the individual choosing the self before God, and hell as the experience of alienation from our own loving Creator.[7] He views the Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness not as a piece of Christ's biography, whereby He was tempted by an actual demon, but as a parable, a way of putting the spiritual conflicts that Christ experienced within Himself:

> The form of the parable is the first in which truth will admit of being embodied. Nor is this all: it is likewise the fullest; and to the parable will the teacher of the truth ever return. Is he who asserts that the . . . [story] contains a simple narrative of actual events, prepared to believe, as the story, so interpreted, indubitably gives us to understand, that a visible demon came to our Lord and, himself the prince of worldly wisdom, thought, by quoting Scripture after the manner of the priests, to persuade a good man to tempt God; thought, by the promise of power, to prevail upon him to cast aside every claim he had upon the human race, in falling down and worshipping one whom he knew to be the adversary of Truth, of Humanity, of God? How could Satan be so foolish? or, if Satan might be so foolish, wherein could such temptation so presented have tempted our Lord? And wherein would a victory over such be a victory for the race? Told as a parable, it is as full of meaning as it would be bare if received as a narrative. (*US*, 87-8).

Although MacDonald's last work of fantastic fiction *Lilith* has as among its main actors Adam, Eve, Lilith and the Great Shadow, they are present less as figures from Christian history than as certain kinds of relationship embodied within a revised myth. Adam and Eve are never presented as those who led all humanity into sin, but as conductors to eternity. Lilith is seen as a baby-killer, a destroyer of the new birth. And the Great Shadow, with his overtones of absolute evil, will in the end lie down to sleep and resurrection in Adam's house. The Shadow is utter antagonism; Lilith furiously insists on her own self in opposition to all others; but Adam

and Eve together embody that perfect human togetherness which hints at the greater 'at-one-ment' all will feel in heaven. For MacDonald such atonement is the fundamental truth of the universe: 'the work of Jesus Christ on earth was the creative atonement. . . . He brings and is bringing God and man, and man and man, into perfect unity' (*US*, 515). By the end of the story Lilith has shifted out of her evil character and yielded up her self to the divine current of the universe. At every point MacDonald challenges and subverts the meanings we bring to these characters from the original biblical myth; even while at the same time he is making another series of mythic identifications of his own.

As for Christ's life and death on earth, MacDonald accepts that as a historical fact, but his real interest in it is as a continuous event; 'We use the past tense about Jesus Christ very foolishly and stupidly. . . . If Jesus ever was anything that He is now' (*GMP*, 187). The Christ child is still with us; the life He lived is the perfect pattern of ours now; and He did not die once, but put His dying for ever into the universe. 'There is no "was" with Him. He is the same. Just what he appeared on the earth He is now, and is in the earth still' (*GMP*, 282; also 147,165). Do not fix on the Cross, or the picture of the dying body, MacDonald says (*US*, 515): rather think of the dying as the perfecting of the Son's relation to the Father, now and always.

MacDonald has little to say of the Incarnation—except that in his view Christ was not really incarnated at all, since He was already the Perfect Man:

> I believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of the eternal Father; that in Him the ideal humanity sat enthroned from all eternity; that as He is the divine man, so He is the human God; that there was no taking of our nature upon Himself, but the showing of Himself as He really was, and that from evermore. (*GMP*, 51; see also 201-02)

Nor in his death did Christ take upon himself the sins of man and pay the price of them through 'sufficient sacrifice' or 'atonement': MacDonald believes that 'The idea that the salvation of Jesus is a salvation from the consequences of our sins is a false, low, mean notion'(*US*, 518). He sees Christ rather as showing in himself a perfect pattern of love and devotion to His Father for man to follow.[8] In his view people are too ready to make destructive theories about Christ when they should know and follow Him out of love and obedience (*US*, 526-33).

And the Last Judgement? For MacDonald there is no such single event at the end of history. According to their choices men have the alienation from God that they want now, and the hellish suffering that entails. They judge for themselves whether they are for heaven or hell, and in a universe of love what else should their refusals do but give them pain? Nor is such pain final: it lasts only so long as men remain obdurate. For God creates and sustains in every man a deepest self which loves Him, and which awaits only its discovery to begin to return towards the heaven that is in Him: 'We are made for love, not for self' (*US*, 312). Such a heaven is no built and finished place, but is always a-making, so long as there are still men a-making to fill it: 'We have had nearly two thousand years' experience of the continued coming of the kingdom. He [Christ] then preached it: it is not yet come; it has been all the time, and is now, drawing slowly nearer' (*LE*, 41).

As we have seen MacDonald does not, except occasionally and formally, allow the concept of a devil who tempts man. He is fundamentally not a dualist: he does not allow the existence of any absolute figure or force opposed to God: 'In those . . . who believe that good is the one power, and that evil exists only because for a time it subserves, cannot help subserving the good, what place can there be for fear?' (*US*, 326). Rather, he sees God's creation of beings separate from Himself as allowing them to choose, for a longer or shorter time, in opposition to His will. This brings sin into being, and, as Creator, quite apart from his love for His children (*US*, 343), God is obliged to correct this and destroy evil (*US*, 510-12). He therefore plants Himself in man's innermost soul to prompt his better urges and desires, makes His universe speak holy truths to him, and sends His Son into the world to 'work . . . atonement in every heart' (*US*, 515).

But if man will not turn to God, then he will find himself trudging into the teeth of a gale; or, in MacDonald's terms, he will experience God's love not as welcoming warmth but as fire. For such opposition, which is the choosing of lesser goods before God, produces a distance from Him which burns ('The Consuming Fire,' *US*, 18-33). But it is still God's love, in another mode, and in the end it will win, because evil has no final reality. 'Endless must be our terror, until we come heart to heart with the fire-core of the universe, the first and the last and the living one!' (*US*, 322-3). MacDonald here breaks down the old notion of a two-natured God, one of love and one of just wrath (*US*, 534-5), which is sometimes carried so far as to suppose that the mildness of the Son intercedes on man's behalf with the righteous anger of the Father. God's love is a consuming fire and 'love loves unto purity' all things it beholds (*US*, 18):

> It is not that the fire will burn us if we do not worship thus; but that the fire will burn us until we worship thus; yea, will go on burning within us until all that is foreign to it has yielded to its force, no longer with pain and consuming, but as the highest consciousness of life, the presence of God. (*US*, 21)

MacDonald can conceive of only two unforgivable sins that might shut a man out from the power of God's love, and even then he is unwilling to see such exclusion as permanent ('It Shall Not Be Forgiven,' *US*, 45-66). Though he at times speaks of hell, the only true hell for him most usually is the experience of alienation from God, an experience so unendurable that it eventually drives man back towards God's love. 'The one principle of hell,' he says, 'is—"I am mine own"' (*US*, 465). (MacDonald paints a terrifying picture of this at the end of 'The Last Farthing,' (*US*, 268-74). Hell is not a separate place eternally opposed to heaven, but a condition of more or less temporary resistance to divine love: this is true even of MacDonald's picture of hell, oft-supposed an absolute one, in his preface to the translation of V.A.Thisted's *Letters from Hell* (1884):

> In these days, when men are gladly hearing afresh that 'in Him is no darkness at all'; that God therefore could not have created any man if he knew that he must live in torture to all eternity; and that his hatred to evil cannot be expressed by injustice, itself the one essence of evil—for certainly it would be nothing less than injustice to punish infinitely what was finitely committed, no sinner being capable of understanding the abstract enormity of what he does,—in these days has arisen another falsehood—less, yet very perilous: thousands of half-thinkers imagine that, since it is declared with such authority that hell is not everlasting, there is no hell at all. To such folly I for one have never given enticement or shelter. I see no hope for many, no way for the divine love to reach them, save through a very ghastly hell. Men have got to repent; there is no other escape for them, and no escape from that. (vii-viii)

Even while he asserts the awful reality of a hell, MacDonald sees it both as non-eternal and as part of the operation of God's love: 'For hell is God's, and not the devil's' (*HG*, 15). Since God is the only reality, universalism is here theologically inevitable.

Central to MacDonald's Christian outlook is the idea of relationship. He believed that as Christ is Son to the Father, so should we be;[9] and that our best experience of the duties and loves in family relationships on earth is what God our heavenly Father offers and asks of our relation to Him: 'The true idea of the universe is the whole family in heaven and earth' (*LE*, 61).[10] The belief that the heart of Christianity lies in growing closer to the Father is the most frequent subject of MacDonald's theological writings. 'The light of our life . . . is simply God—God—God—nothing but God' (*US*, 586); 'The profoundest truth of the universe is the relation of the son to the Father' (*GMP*, 311; see also *US*, 428). For MacDonald Christ's story is that of a perfect relation of love and trust we hope one day to enter ourselves. Whatever sufferings Christ experiences He still willingly and lovingly submits Himself to the purposes of His Father; even when He is on the Cross, when He is in the deepest pit of apparent alienation, it is still '"My father, my father"' to whom He cries (*US*, 111-14). Christ's life is a witness to the perfect relationship, the At-one-ment, we should try to emulate as we grow in love of God:[11]

> The work of Jesus Christ on earth was the creative atonement, because it works atonement in every heart. He brings and is bringing God and man, and man and man, into perfect unity: "I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."' (*US*, 515; see also 510-11, 536-40)

The whole universe is a network of relationships and correspondences. Oxygen is related to hydrogen to produce water; the sun is related to the earth to produce heat and light. These are not mere causal or scientific relations: since God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, they are metaphysical bonds too. And the relation is always two-way: the Son could not love the Father if the Father did not love the Son (*US*, 476-7), and so too with the relations between man and God ('The upstretched meets the downstretched hand' (*ADO*, 72).

MacDonald saw this perfect relationship, between Son and Father, man and God and nature, demonstrated in Christ's miracles, on which in 1870 he published a whole separate study. For most of MacDonald's contemporaries the miracles of Christ in the New Testament would seem simple marvels, breaking natural law, and designed only to increase evidence and awe of Christ's more than human power. To Victorian scientists, on the other hand, believing in the pre-eminence of natural laws, they would seem more or less suspect. But for MacDonald they are signs of the deeper laws of nature that become open to all who grow close to God at any time. They are in Christ the expressions of a perfect relation of creature and Creator, which then incorporates the other creature that is Nature: MacDonald even suggests that when we become really close in our relation to God, we too will be capable of such miracles as walking on water (*US*, 285). Miracles are in this view not more wondrous than anything else, for all things come from God:

> [Christ's] miracles in bread and wine were far less grand and less beautiful than the works of the Father they represented, in making the corn to grow in the valleys, and the grapes to drink the sunlight on the hillsides of the world, with all their infinitudes of tender gradation and delicate mystery of birth. (*MOL*, 13; *US*, 244))

And, from another view, miracles are not violations of the laws of nature, but 'at least a possible fulfillment of her deepest laws' (*MOL*, 13): at the deepest level they are in harmonious relation with nature. Into this idiom come the changing of the water into wine, the healing of the lunatic child with the unclean spirit and the very Resurrection of Christ himself. Into this idiom too, at a lesser level come the 'fantastic' worlds of Fairy Land or the Region of the Seven Dimensions that MacDonald has created in his own work, for their seemingly marvelous natures witness in their own degree to the new and much larger Nature that is revealed through the man-God relation.

MacDonald makes separation from others one the great enemies of the divine universe: 'We so often choose death, the thing that separates and kills; for everything that parts us from our fellow, and every thing that parts us from God is a killing of us' (*GMP*, 87):

> Every one will, I presume, confess to more or less misery. Its apparent source may be this or that; its real source is, to use a poor figure, a dislocation of the juncture between the created and the creating life. This primal evil is the parent of evils unnumbered, hence of miseries multitudinous. (*LE*, 35)

The enemy is the self, which leads a man to 'cut his own stem from his root that he might call it his own and love it' (*US*, 486, 619). Contrasted to this is the creation of man as a free and separate agent by God: for this was done so that out of it there might grow a new coming together or atonement and an enrichment of love's power (*US*, 299); or, as MacDonald puts it, 'Two at least are needed for oneness' (*US*, 298, 428).

There is nevertheless a vein of Platonism running through MacDonald's work. He believed that the universe is a thought in the mind of God;[12] that the world is a mirror of God and an analysis of the spirit of man;[13] that the soul makes the body;[14] and that on this earth God has his special dwelling place in the innermost spirits of men.[15] This tendency emerges in MacDonald's theology also in the way that almost all of it is directed not at helping others in this world so much as in preparing them for the next, by getting into the right individual relationship with God. MacDonald does sometimes insist on love of one's neighbour as an essential part of the Christian life, but when he comes to speak of it we feel the change of gear to the needful rather than the desired (*GMP*, 110, 155-6; *US*, 126-8, 379). Indeed his account of Christ is much more concerned with Christ's relation to the Father than to man. As we have seen, he scarcely mentions the Incarnation whereby God became mortal: actually he says that 'I don't believe that Jesus became a man by taking our body. . . . He was *the* Man from all eternity' (*GMP*, 201). MacDonald's view of the Crucifixion rather misses Christ's dying out of love and sympathy for man: Jesus, he tells us, loved His Father before us (*GMP*, 86), and came here not out of love of man, but to make us love God more (*US*, 162, 430). The emphasis is always away from earth, towards the Father. The direction is not downward, but upward, one of MacDonald's favourite prepositions.

It is that note of ecstatic anticipation of God and Heaven that runs like a great wave under MacDonald's theology. What he wants above all, as his God wants, is oneness. That oneness can be glimpsed on this earth through the childlike vision of the holy world, through love, and through walking in God's ways; but in the land beyond death it will grow towards perfection:

> This life, this eternal life, consists for man in absolute oneness with God and all divine modes of being, oneness with every phase of right and harmony. It consists in a love as deep as it is universal, as conscious as it is unspeakable; a love that can no more be reasoned about than life itself—a love whose presence is its all-sufficing proof and justification, whose absence is an annihilating defect: he who has it not cannot believe in it: how should death believe in life, though all the birds of God are singing jubilant over the empty tomb! The delight of such a being, the splendour of a consciousness rushing from the wide open doors of the fountain of existence, the ecstasy of the spiritual sense into which the surge of life essential, immortal, increate, flows in silent fullness from the heart of hearts—what may it, what must it not be, in the great day of God and the individual soul! (*US*, 309)[16]

## Notes

[1] MacDonald 'preached perhaps more than a thousand sermons over the course of his life' (*GMP*, preface.

[2] The best account so far is in William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, Herts.: 1987), ch.24, pp.237-63.

[3] See e.g. *GMP*, 48-9, 87, 307, 321; *US*, 79, 275-6, 328-62, 384-412, 450, 500-40, 577-92. In MacDonald's view different churches and doctrines produce 'separation, repulsion, recoil between the component particles of the Lord's body' (*GMP*, 48-9). Also, the dogmatic habit leads to considering human beings as masses, rather than as the individuals with each of whom God has a unique relationship ('The New Name,' *US*, 67-78).

[4] 'What in the name of God is our knowledge of the elements of the atmosphere to our knowledge of the elements of Nature? What is the analysis of

water to the babble of a running stream?' (*US*, 350-1); see also 439, 452, 462-9. On the inability of science and the intellect either to prove or to disprove the existence of God—a side-swipe at contemporary loss of belief in the face of scientific discovery—see *GMP*, 71. MacDonald often widens his attack to one on the unfettered intellect itself (*GMP*, 135-6, 145, 218; *US*, 206, 259, 452-3, 468-9, 532-3, 589. The view is that 'Your theory is not your faith, nor anything like it. Your faith is your obedience' (*US*, 532). It has to be strange to see a man once destined for a career as a scientist so repudiating what must still be part of his nature and mental habit.

[5] This is a mantra of MacDonald's thought. See *GMP*, 73, 79, 171, 211, 296, 322; *US*, 185, 206, 211, 226, 259-61, 390-403, 437, 471-2, 504, 520, 533, 588.

[6] See also *GMP*, 254, 309-10; *US*, 500-40, 550-3; *LE*, 15-16.

[7] Thus he views evil more as a mental than a physical event: 'Our wrong deeds are our dead works; our evil thoughts are our live sins' (*LE*, 16).

[8] *GMP*, 162, 184-90; *US*, 284, 286, 424-6, 429-30, 490, 537-8.

[9] *GMP*, 48, 188, 278; *US*, 284, 422.

[10] See also *LE*,79; *GMP*, 90, 93, 94, 307. 'The child-relation is the one eternal, ever-enduring, never-changing relation' (*LE*, 71).

[11] *US*, 424, 429-31, 470-5, 490-1, 537-8: 'The highest truth is the relation in which man stands to the source of his being' (*US*, 475).

[12] *GMP*, 19, 100, 106, 328; *US*, 200, 291-2, 302, 456.

[13] *US*, 463, 467; *MOL*, 92; *ADO*, 4-10.

[14] *MOL*, 52-3; *US*, 291-2, 302, 456.

[15] *GMP*, 9, 105; *US* 118, 161, 255-6; *LE*, 26.

[16] See also *US*, 295, 312-3, 612-9; *LE*, 'The Hope of the Universe,' 91-102.

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*GMP* *George MacDonald in the Pulpit: The 'Spoken' Sermons of George MacDonald*, compiled by J. Joseph Flynn and David Edwards (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996)

*LE* *Life Essential: The Hope of the Gospel*, ed. Rolland Hein (Wheaton, ILL: Harold Shaw, 1974)

*MOL* *The Miracles of Our Lord*, ed. Rolland Hein (Wheaton, ILL: Harold Shaw, 1980)

*PGPC* *The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie*, ed. Roderick McGillis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990)

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## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# MacDonald's Counter-literature

Colin Manlove

How do MacDonald's fantasies reflect his very individual theology? If we start from his dislike of fixed creeds and doctrines, we find this paralleled in his fantasy in its refusal to be overtly Christian. We sometimes forget, when we speak of MacDonald as a writer of Christian fantasy, that, with the possible exception of *Lilith*, the Christianity is not at all evident. This is not the case in his novels, where the story may describe the growth of a character in awareness of Christ. The difference between the fantasy and the novels is explained by MacDonald in his essay 'The Fantastic Imagination' (1893), where he says that the fairy tale or fantasy works by suggestion rather than statement, because it comes from the mysterious and inner world of the imagination rather than from observation of the external world. 'It is there not so much to convey a meaning as to wake a meaning' (*ADO* 317). In his fantasy MacDonald wants to create a living or even a mystical experience of God, rather than to state directly how He is the Love that we must all follow. God Himself is beyond all our meanings, classifications and words. In this world He can only be spoken about by indirections, by symbols that point beyond themselves—perhaps even best even through music rather than words.

Long before C.S. Lewis tried to write Christian fantasy that got away from the 'stained-glass associations' of Christianity, MacDonald was doing the same, not only out of a wish to convert, but from a desire to convey anew the living wonder of God. By writing in *Phantastes* and *Lilith* the stories of Victorian characters who wander in the strange worlds of their unconscious minds, and finally come to the knowledge of a great good that is approaching them, he opens to readers the dawning experience of a God without a name. Each reader, he says, will feel the story differently. Some may, on this way of thinking, feel Him rather like the Pan god in *The Wind in the Willows*, some like the giant Oyarsa of Venus in C.S. Lewis's *Perelandra*, some as the great imagination of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*—and all of these fleeting identifications will be at once right and wrong, for no sooner do we identify Him with any one of them than His glory has moved elsewhere. God is in every symbol, and in no one of them. MacDonald himself writes several forms of fantasy, from Spenserian romance to children's fairy tale; in *At the Back of the North Wind* the story is set both in the seemingly ordinary world of Victorian London and in the airborne realm of North Wind herself; in 'The Golden Key' we have a Bunyanesque journey from this world to the next, through strange faerian and underground worlds. Only in *Lilith* does MacDonald use Christian symbols, and then to recreate them: his Adam and Eve are not here fallen man but guides to heaven; his Lilith is dramatised not as Adam's first wife but as the murderess of children; and the serpent has turned to the worm of evil that has entered Lilith. Here the Genesis myth is evoked only to be upturned.

Subversion of settled assumptions is often to be found in MacDonald's fantasies, in order to open the imagination to the holy nature of the universe. The whole of *Phantastes* is a continual undermining of Anodos's settled assurances, from the initial transformation of his Victorian bedroom to a glade in Fairy Land, to the succession of strange and ill-consorted sequence of experiences through which he then passes—a lady in alabaster he wakes by singing to her, a pair of malignant trees, his acquisition of a shadow, his arrival at a fairy palace, and his journey thence to a submersible cottage in the midst of an ocean, then to a plateau where he helps two brothers overcome three giants, a tower in which he finds himself shut, and a forest church where he alone sees that the worshippers are being sacrificed. To all this Anodos can only say, 'it is no use trying to account for things in Fairy Land,' and that the traveller there soon learns to take 'everything as it comes, like a child, who, being in a chronic condition of wonder, is surprised at nothing' (*PL* 33). Subversion reigns right to the end, for Anodos, having given his life for the forest-worshippers, enters on a posthumous life of growing bliss, from which he is abruptly thrust back into his Victorian world.

In addition, the oft-remarked 'disconnectedness' that MacDonald espouses in *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, means that there is often no *reason*, nor evident *cause*, why one event should precede rather than follow another, or indeed for the particular sequence of a narrative. Phantastes is a Fairyland picaresque, where all events seem happened upon, by a character who must simply 'act and wander'(*PL* 40). Why for example should Anodos meet the Ash, Alder and Beech trees before he meets his Shadow, and why do these episodes come before he reaches the fairy palace? No narrative or causal sequence is there to explain the order, and sometimes no identifiable spiritual sequence either. In *Lilith* the narrative is subverted by being shown by Mr. Raven to be on one level a waste of time, for Vane is throughout resisting the inevitable: "'Everybody who is not at home, has to go home'" (*PL* 225). 'Connectedness' and a sense of the rightness of the order are often only to be felt at an unconscious level, where rational and empirical sequences are of less account than spiritual consequence. For instance, Vane cannot repent till that part of him that is Lilith repents. In both *Phantastes* and *Lilith* it seems that the hero returns to his own time and place as the same young man who began the story: Anodos is still the tyro preparing to start out on life; Vane is still the young man preparing to come into his inheritance. But matters of the spirit have changed: the launch of Anodos at the end is of quite another order since his journey through Fairy Land; and the meanings of 'young man' and 'coming into his inheritance' have altered entirely for Vane since he entered the region of the seven dimensions.

MacDonald will not leave us wholly confused or deprived of sequence: there is usually some lodestar far off, whether it is the elusive white lady in *Phantastes*, the suggestive 'brain-house' in *The Princess and Curdie*, or the cottage of dead souls in *Lilith*; and there is often a recurrent motif, or even the clear statement of a theme, which leaves us to see a little way by its light. MacDonald's 'aim' is not to blur truth, but to avoid fixities and allegories in fairy tales (*ADO*, 317), whereby the mind can seize on and name one aspect of a work and pronounce it the whole. In the same way he opposed the way that theology and doctrine seize on a single interpretation of Christian mystery. For him God cares only for 'live' things and truths, 'not things set down in a book or in a memory' (*US*, 218). So it is that nothing stays still in his fantasy, and metamorphosis is a theme throughout. God lives in the unconscious imagination of man, and there, as Vane finds in *Lilith*, 'A single thing would sometimes seem to be and mean many things, with an uncertain identity at the heart of them, which kept constantly altering their look' (*PL*, 227). Because MacDonald's fantasy comes from the unconscious, it subverts causal narrative to the point where it takes on the character of a series of dream images. *Phantastes* is shot through with interpolated stories and quotations from poets. Like Keats, MacDonald wishes his reader to be in 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching out after fact and reason' (Keats, letter of 21 Dec. 1817), in which condition alone the mind is open to deeper spiritual understanding.

*Phantastes* and *Lilith* are certainly extremes in MacDonald's art of 'disconnection.' In the longer children's fantasies—*At the Back of the North Wind*, the 'Curdie' books and *The Lost Princess*—we have books that do tell a story. However in each case the plot is really a series of more or less islanded sub-stories. *At the Back of the North Wind* has two very different narratives taking turn about—of little Diamond's life in London, and of his airborne journeys with North Wind—and each has the effect of questioning the other. So too in *The Wise Woman* two girls are being separately educated, and to very different effect, and these stories never link up, though the partial change in Princess Rosamund comments on the moral intransigence of the shepherd's daughter Agnes. (Here we may also see how MacDonald subverts the fairy-tale cliché of the poor girl coming out on top.) In *The Princess and the Goblin* the story of little Irene's life in the house and with her 'grandmother' in the attics alternates with the narrative of Curdie and the goblins, which for long seems to have nothing to do with the other. As for *The Princess and Curdie*, it has two stories, the subversion of Curdie the miner's complacent materialism, and later, Curdie's undermining of the plots against their king by the predatory citizens of Gwyntystorm. Meanwhile this book is itself subverting its sister story *The Princess and the Goblin* by giving a much darker picture of a human evil, rather than a goblin one, and of innocence now not so much having to be protected but put at real risk. If the first 'Princess' book was in a sense Innocence, here the children are older and living through Experience.

The idiom of MacDonald's fantasy is frequently that of metamorphosis, whereby a character or object does not have just one but several identities, and the reader cannot fix on any one. North Wind in *At the Back of the North Wind* can be now a towering giantess, now a tiny creature; the old lady of *The Princess and Curdie* can appear as a wolf, or an old crone, or a beautiful woman; Lilith and Mara in *Lilith* shift constantly from women to leopardesses, and the old librarian of Vane's house turns into a raven and then appears as the first and last man Adam.

Subversion of a sort also exists between *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, which were MacDonald's first and last fantasies: though both are of similarly disconnected, dream-like form, the one concerns a man's education into life, the other instruction in how to leave it; the one is about beginnings, the other deals with endings; *Phantastes* is one man's journey through his own inner landscape, *Lilith* gives an image of the posthumous

landscape of all people. In all these various ways MacDonald uses vision to counter vision, truth to subvert truth, to show how any picture of God's reality is partial. For him reality is paradoxical: throughout his fantasy he plays against our belief in the solidity of the characters and their strange worlds, the simultaneous fact that they are all journeys within the mind. In 'The Golden Key,' Mossy and Tangle are travelling through life towards death and beyond to the 'country whence the shadows fall'; but each is also following an individual journey through his and her imaginations towards the God who lives in the depths of the human mind. Both Anodos and Vane are dreaming while at the same time becoming more awake than they have ever been in their lives before; and they are travelling in worlds of the spirit. Little Diamond dreams North Wind, but she tells him there is truth in the dream. The landscape of *The Princess and the Goblin* is both mental and physical, symbolising a three-levelled mind, with the bestial goblins at its foot, the princess living her daylight life in the house halfway up the hill, and many of her nights with her great-grandmother in the attics. In *The Wise Woman* the cottage expresses the different minds of its inhabitants, and while living there they are in one sense also living in their own interior worlds. And every one of the shorter fairy tales is in some sense a journey within the spirit.

MacDonald is as subversive at the level of words and sentences as in that of whole narratives. In *Phantastes* Anodos complains that trying to re-tell a story he finds in a book in the fairy library is 'like trying to reconstruct a forest out of broken branches and withered leaves' (*PL* 89), and in *Lilith* Vane declares that this failure of language is also owing to the elusive nature of its subject:

> A single thing would sometimes seem to be and mean many things, with an uncertain identity at the heart of them, which kept constantly altering their look. I am indeed often driven to set down what I know to be a clumsy and doubtful representation of the mere feeling aimed at. . . . (*PL* 227)

One strategy to try to make up for this is to write in a medley of styles, hoping to capture more of the truth by using more reflections of it. This, it could be argued, is what MacDonald does in *Phantastes*, which is scattered with poetry amidst the prose; and the prose itself often varies between a forensic or 'scientific,' and a more emotive mode. At the same time MacDonald uses quotations from other writers at the head of every chapter, and recounts at length two of the tales Anodos reads in the fairy library. In this way his book becomes thoroughly 'inter-textual,' not just one man's vision but those of writers throughout the ages and in other dimensions. This is attempted by a different technique in *Lilith*, where Vane's individual posthumous experience is embedded in those of all people, and the symbolism has universal and archetypal as much as local resonance.

And here again we might argue that the whole range of MacDonald's fantasy—now in the idiom of German Romantic fairy tale, now in the apocalyptic mode of Blake, or else moving from adult to children's fantasy and back again—also serves as one means of capturing just a little of that ever-changing and indescribable divine reality he spent all his life trying to portray. But still he knew that words were inadequate because words try to define reality, and all he could do was to subvert their definitions. He argued that words are not just signs but work emotionally: 'They have length, and breadth, and outline: have they nothing to do with depth? Have they only to describe, never to impress? Has nothing any claim to their use but the definite?' (*ADO* 319). But these are in the end rhetorical questions, because he knows that their use depends on the natures of their users. Thus he goes on to limit his proper audience to mothers and children, who do not ask for direct answers: 'If any strain of my "broken music" make a child's eyes flash, or his mother's grow for a moment dim, my labour will not have been in vain' (*ADO* 322).

MacDonald's fantasies may also be said to resist definition or fixity in the way that they often do not have clear endings. At the close of his story Anodos is thrust away from faerian bliss to wait in this world; Vane in *Lilith* is similarly turned aside from heaven just as he is about to enter it. *At the Back of the North Wind* leaves us to decide whether Diamond was a sick and deluded child who has just died of his illness or whether he truly met North Wind and has now been called to the mystical world at her back. *The Princess and the Goblin* may finish with the destruction of the goblins, but Irene and Curdie part, Curdie has not yet learned to believe in the reality of Irene's mystic grandmother, and she is still a presence in the attics of the house: so that we look to a sequel. *The Wise Woman* breaks off with one child on the road to spiritual improvement, but not the other. The end of *The Princess and Curdie* is not only, as it would be in fairy tale the overthrow of the king's enemies and the marriage of Irene and Curdie, but also what comes long after that, the destruction of Gwytystorm through human greed and its return to a wilderness. It must be said, though, that in MacDonald's shorter fairy tales there is often much more of a utopian conclusion: the light princess is saved from her curse and married by the prince, the Day Boy and the Night Girl destroy the evil witch and marry, Buffy Bob and Tricksy Wee master the giant and escape, Colin in the two stories of 'The Carasoyn' rescues his wife-to-be and his child from the fairies.

In the absence of a marked sense of orthodox Christian history (fall, redemption, judgement and salvation) in his theology, we find that correspondingly his fantastic works are broadly lacking in a sense of

time, and even of perspective. Time conditions life *sub specie æternitatis*, and is to some extent evident in the novels of 'real life,' particularly the earlier and more biographical ones: but in the fantasies we rarely find any sense of the past, or any character looking back to reflect on how far they have come—except in the sense that the protagonists of *Phantastes* and *Lilith* are returned at the end to the place they started from.

As for the future, it is fair to say that every fantasy looks forward intensely to what is to come, but that future has no certain date, being outside time. So far as our life on earth was concerned, MacDonald felt that 'Care for the next minute is just as foolish as care for the morrow, or for a day in the next thousand years—in neither can we do anything, in both God is doing everything' (*US*, 210-11). Few of the fantasies bring us to anticipate what may lie ahead: rather we are to attend intensely to each episode. The smaller fairy tales, apart from 'The Golden Key,' have none of the three-part structure of traditional tales, nor is the protagonist set a task.

Those who make plans, who try to shape events and the future to their desires are often evil—thus Makemnoit in 'The Light Princess,' the fairy queen in 'The Carasoyn,' Watho in 'The Day Boy and the Night Girl,' the goblins and the evil counsellors in the 'Curdie' books, the wicked queen in *Lilith*. Even Curdie the miner in *The Princess and the Goblin* cannot succeed in his merely human attempts to discover the plots of the goblins, without the eventual help of Princess Irene acting at the behest of her grandmother. And even when he realises what the plot is, he cannot warn the people about the princess, because he is shot and taken prisoner by the guards. However his counterplots to save the king in *The Princess and Curdie* do succeed because he is there working as the agent of Irene's great-grandmother and is helped by her creatures. Even when this is done, the small company he has would have been overwhelmed by the army which his foes muster, and it takes the arrival of Irene's mystic great-grandmother with her pigeons to produce a more lasting, though not a final victory over the destroyers of Gwyntystorm. The broad point here is that foresight and planning involve narrowing the possibilities of the future to one's own perception. Irene's great-grandmother tells Curdie he must travel to the king's court at the city of Gwyntystorm, but does not say why, telling him '"You must learn to use far less direct directions"' (*PC* 75). We may suppose that she 'knows' what is going to happen, but that does not make the future any less of a risk, for it depends on the individual and uncertain choices of mortals which she will in no way constrain.

Just as the idea of relationship and 'at-one-ment' with God is at the heart of MacDonald's Christianity, so it is in his fantasies. In both *Phantastes* and *Lilith* the protagonist pursues a false relationship until he finds out this true and divine one. MacDonald's fantasies are most of them fundamentally mystical. Anodos follows the white lady until he sees that she belongs to another, and turns his gaze upward. Vane becomes involved with Lilith and then Lona, and the one spurns and tries to destroy him, while Lona, Lilith's own child, is killed by her in a total repudiation of relationship; but in the end all become one with the dead who await resurrection. In *At the Back of the North Wind*, the 'Curdie' books and *The Lost Princess*, the core of the stories is the developing relation of young people with mystic figures who are either gateways to or surrogates for knowledge of God. (At the end of both 'Curdie' books the relation of Irene and Curdie is broken by separation or death.) The journey of the boy and girl Mossy and Tangle in 'The Golden Key' is through layer upon layer of being (symbolised in the three Old Men, the seven and then the eighth colours of the rainbow, and the serially-slabbed entrance of the mountain) to reach the divine source of all. In 'The Shadows,' Ralph Rinkelman, made king of the shadows, is introduced to deeper levels of their flickering natures, to the point of mystical revelation. Even 'The Light Princess' touches on the theme of Christ's love, in the death of the prince for his beloved and his subsequent resurrection into joy. In 'The Day Boy and the Night Girl,' the coming together of boy and girl is important not so much for their own marriage, as for the heavenly marriage of all things such a union of light and dark, conscious and unconscious, portends: '"Who knows," Nycteris would say to Photogen, " that when we go out, we shall not go into a day as much greater than your day as your day is greater than my night?"'

We find no final separations or polarities in MacDonald's fantasies either. The idiom is not dualism but paradox, whereby seeming opposites are shown to be related. The tension is not between fixed terms, but between mobile ones: God, endlessly and variously loving on the one side, and man, now in harmony with, now truant from, the love flowing from the creative centre. Paradoxically the love flows out in order to return: God loves and creates outwards to the circumference of the universe (*GMP*, 108), so that the creatures of the universe may know that love through coming back. 'Born of the heart of God, we have of ourselves to go back to the heart of God as our endless home—as our only home' (*GMP*, 268).[1] 'The whole system of the universe works upon this law—the driving of things upward towards the centre' (*US*, 132).[2] Indeed centre is the word, for some of the fantasies describe circles or spirals, ending where they began, and in others action is focused on a centre, such as the rainbow's end in 'The Golden Key,' the castle in *The Princess and the Goblin*, Gwyntystorm in *The Princess and Curdie* or the cottage in *The Wise Woman*. Actually in the Princess and Curdie we have two centres, the country castle with the mines, and Gwyntystorm: but when Gwyntystorm is purged of evil, the one migrates

into the other, as the remaining good characters move from the country to the city.

In many of the fantasies the antagonist is the self, but this is no dualism, for the self is not absolute but subject to change. Even the goblins of *The Princess and the Goblin* and the evil people of *The Princess and Curdie* are not fixedly evil, but devolved from higher creatures, and in the end they will have to climb back all the way to God. So too it is that the self-orientation of Anodos and of Vane is broken down; so it is that Rosamond in *The Lost Princess* comes to see how destructive of joy her self is, while Agnes must still go a longer path to find that out; so it is that the narrow materialism of Curdie, the self-amusement of the Light Princess, and the self-pleasing fairyland of Alice in 'Cross Purposes' are shown as the hollow shams of pride.

Nevertheless, if relationship with God is the central aim, relationship with man is somewhat more occasional or fleeting. So it is that the situation in the fantasy is often one in which the protagonist is alone and/or developing his or her nature through meetings with mystic personages. In *Phantastes*, Anodos never meets his White Lady, and his encounters with all other personages are passing episodes in his wanderings; his only constant companion is his unwelcome Shadow. In *Lilith* Vane wanders alone like Anodos, and those he loves either spurn him (Lilith) or die (Lona). Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind* is alone in his relation with North Wind, for no-one else believes she exists. Even in *The Princess and the Goblin*, where Curdie the miner's son has to protect Princess Irene against the plots of the goblins, the emphasis is as much on Irene's relation with her great-great grandmother; while Curdie, who is too materialist to see this lady, is often reduced to the level of a loyal retainer rather than a loving friend; and in the end he goes back to being a miner while Irene is taken away by her father the King to the palace in far-off Gwyntystorm. In *The Princess and Curdie* Curdie is largely alone in his mission to save the King and Irene. In *The Lost Princess* the two girls being educated by the Wise Woman never meet. There are more relationships in the lighter short fairy tales—as between princes and princesses in 'Little Daylight' and 'The Light Princess,' or between Alice and Richard in 'Cross Purposes,' or between Buffy-Bob and Tricksy-Wee in 'The Giant's Heart'; and there is more society in 'The Carasoyn.' But whenever the subject is more serious, the protagonists become more solitary, as with 'The Day Boy and the Night Girl,' or with Ralph Rinkelman in 'The Shadows,' or with the mostly separate stories of Mossy and Tangle in 'The Golden Key.'

Partly because of this emphasis on relationship with God more than with man, and partly through MacDonald's Platonic emphasis on mind, there is from time to time a note of '*contemptus mundi*' in his work. He can at times be quite harsh in his denunciations of our attachment to material things, and indeed in his dislike of the evil he saw in his own Victorian society.[3] This comes out in his fantasy where the protagonists often either leave this world, as in *Phantastes*, 'Cross Purposes,' 'The Golden Key,' *At the Back of the North Wind*, and *Lilith*, or are taken out of it, as in 'The Day Boy and the Night Girl' or *The Lost Princess*. (It is also seen in the novels in the frequent other-wordliness of the protagonists.) It is found too in the misanthropic latter half of *The Princess and Curdie*, where the corrupt people of Gwyntystorm are finally destroyed by their own greed; in the bitterness of tone often found in *The Lost Princess*, or even in *Lilith*, where Vane's this-worldly attitudes, natural for one who has just been thrown into a fantastic realm that inverts his own, are mocked by Mr. Raven, and his attempts to help its inhabitants seen as a waste of time.

## Notes

[1] See also *GMP*, 5, 300; *US*, 117-18, 456-7.
[2] See also *US*, 322-3, 324, 431, 491, 605; *GMP*, 328.
[3] *US*, 308, 313, 488, 596.

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*GMP* *George MacDonald in the Pulpit: The 'Spoken' Sermons of George MacDonald*, compiled by J. Joseph Flynn and David Edwards (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996)

*LE* *Life Essential: The Hope of the Gospel*, ed. Rolland Hein (Wheaton, ILL: Harold Shaw, 1974)

*MOL* *The Miracles of Our Lord*, ed. Rolland Hein (Wheaton, ILL: Harold Shaw, 1980)

*PGPC* *The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie*, ed. Roderick McGillis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990)

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